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Defences of Unitarianism for the Year 1787,

CONTAINING

L E T T E R S

T O

THE REV. DR. GEDDES,

T O

THE REV. DR. PRICE, PART II.

AND TO

The CANDIDATES for ORDERS in the Two UNIVERSITIES.

PART II.

Relating to Mr. HOWES'S APPENDIX to his fourth Volume of
Observations on Books, a Letter by an UNDER-GRADUATE
of Oxford, Dr. CROFT'S Bampton Lectures, and several other
PUBLICATIONS.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

AC. IMP. PETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. AUREL. MED.
PARIS. HARLEM. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

————— Meliora supersunt
Sæcula. Non omnes veniet Lethæus in annos
Iste sopor. Potesunt, discussis forte tenebris,
Ad purum priscumque jubar remeare nepotes.

PETRARCA AFRICA.

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Journal of the Institution for the Year 1887

CONTAINING

LETTERS

TO

THE REV. DR. CHURCH

TO

THE REV. DR. PRICE PART II.

AND TO

THE CANDIDATES & OTHERS IN THE TWO UNIVERSITIES.

PART II.



JOHN BARNES, LONDON.

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THE
P R E F A C E.

AS I wish not to trouble the public unnecessarily with the defence of what I have written on the subject of the divine unity, and it is become physically impossible for me to make particular replies to each of my opponents, I propose for the future to write one pamphlet annually, in which I shall take notice of every thing that I shall think deserving of it, in such publications in favour of the doctrine of the Trinity (from the state of things in early times) as the preceding year shall produce. If any thing should require more speedy animadversion, I may perhaps be permitted to make use of the Gentleman's Magazine, as I did with respect to Mr. Howes.

I have been in expectation of the present year (which is now almost expired) produc-

ing treatises of more consequence than it has done. However, I am willing to give all my opponents whatever *time* they may think necessary to the due perfection of their works. Some time must also be allowed to their waiting for, and complimenting, one another; as each of them seems desirous of shifting the burden to shoulders more able to bear it than his own. Thus Mr. Madan "leaves me for due correction to the superior abilities, and erudition of Dr. Horsley, Mr. Howes, and the amiable and "reverend dean of Canterbury."—If I do "not smart under the masterly scourge "of Dr. Horsley," he says, "it is a bad "sign for me." All, however, that I can do is to invite this tremendous scourge, and the production of it is not more sincerely desired by Mr. Madan than it is by myself.

Let Dr. Horsley then (now that his period of eighteen months is expired) appear again in support of his attack on the veracity of Origen, or of his church of orthodox Jewish

P R E F A C E.

Jewish christians at Jerusalem, after the time of Adrian. As he has been pretty well comforted for his *defeat*, he cannot doubt of his being amply rewarded for a complete *victory*. Let Mr. Howes also proceed with his argument to prove the late origin of Unitarians. The public are willing enough to give them a favourable hearing, and certainly *expect* to hear from them. They are also looking for the great work of Dr. Horne, and something unknown, but something considerable, from Mr. White, as well as from others, whose names, having only been mentioned in discourse, I have no right to call upon here.

Every year (with satisfaction I see it) brings this important controversy nearer to its proper termination; and the attention that is actually given to it, at home and abroad, and which increases continually, shews that the contempt with which *some* profess to treat it, as if it could have no serious consequences, is only affected; and that if it was in their power to come forth with any advantage themselves, they would

not fail to do it. I am happy to find that the forward zeal of many prevails over the superior discretion of others, and will not suffer the business to sleep. And the publications on one side will be the means of procuring a hearing for those on the other.

As my antagonists in general are very liberal of their compliments to each other, and (in order to encourage others to undertake what they think proper to decline) promise them an easy victory, so some of them combat one another, which will shorten my labour. Thus Dr. Croft makes little account of Mr. Parkhurst's and Mr. Madan's argument from the plural form of the word *elohim*, and Mr. Howes leaves the character of Origen unimpeached, and Dr. Horsley's Orthodox Jewish Church without defence. Some of them contend for the absolute equality of the Son to the Father, and others plead only for any thing that can, by any construction, be called *divinity*. I need not mention the opposition between the Arians and Trinitarians, as they do not profess to defend the same ground.

I am

I am singularly happy in having an opportunity of addressing a few more letters to Dr. Price, in consequence of the *Appendix* to the second edition of his Sermons, and I more particularly congratulate our readers on the acquisition of such a controversial writer as Dr. Geddes. I feel a satisfaction that I cannot express in discussing this important question with such men as these. It would even give me pleasure to have an opportunity of acknowledging any mistake they should point out to me. Why is it that, excepting only the dean of Canterbury, the members of the church of England cannot write with the same liberality, such as becomes gentlemen, scholars, and christians? When the *history of this controversy* shall be written by an impartial hand (and such a one I doubt not will in due time be found) the champions of the established church will not appear to the most advantage, either with respect to the condition of their arms, or their temper, and skill in the use of them.

How

How long this controversy will last, or in what form I shall continue my part in it, is impossible for me to say. My present intention is to proceed with writing *Letters to the Candidates for Orders in the two Universities*, and, at a proper time, to close the whole with a serious address to the bench of bishops, and the legislature; after which I shall have done all that I apprehend to be in my power to promote an important and desirable reformation.

 E R R A T A.

N. B. (*b*) signifies from the bottom of the page.

Page 1. l. 5. for *Father*, read *Fathers*.

— 37. l. 11. (*b*) for *preposition*, read *proposition*.

— 72. l. 5. (*b*) for *pretended*, read *the pretended*.

— 79. l. 8. for *have*, read *to have*.

— 107. l. 4. for *of it*, read *of the Trinity*:

— 139. l. 8. for *Mr. Burgh*, read *Dr. Burgh*.

7 DE61

THE

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L E T T E R S

TO THE

REVEREND DR. GEDDES.

LETTERS

TO THE



REVEREND DR.

LETTERS TO THE
TO THE
REVEREND DR. GEDDES.

LETTER I.

*Of the Doctrine of the Scriptures, and that of the
apostolical Father.*

REVEREND SIR,

I Have seldom received more satisfaction than I have done from the perusal of the *Letter* you have been so obliging as to address to me, in order "to prove," as you say, "by one prescriptive argument, that the divinity of Jesus Christ was the primitive tenet of christianity." You write with a candour becoming a christian, and a *Catholic*, not in name only, but in reality; while others, whose general system of christianity is more nearly the same with my own, have engaged in the same controversy with a spirit highly unbecoming the character they professed.

Different as your opinions are from mine, you say, p. 5. "I grant that you are a christian as well as I, and embrace you as my fellow disciple in Jesus. And if you were not a disciple of Jesus, still I would embrace you as my fellow man." In return, I can do no less than embrace you in both characters. I do it from my heart; and I

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hope

hope that nothing in my address to you will give the lie to my profession. We are fellow Christians, fellow men, and joint enquirers after truth; willing, I doubt not, to assist each other in our enquiries, as justly esteeming truth to be the most valuable of all acquisitions, by whomsoever it be found.

In one circumstance relating to this controversy I, however, differ from you. You expect, p. 35, the ablest defenders of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ in the church of England. On the contrary, I expect them in your church of Rome, in which it originated. It is a doctrine which the church of England only received from you, and without any alteration whatever. It is therefore still your proper tenet, and what you should consider yourselves as peculiarly bound to defend. The members of the church of England, will naturally look up to you for the defence of that tenet, which, without any particular examination, they received from you; and they may perhaps abandon it, if its proper parent should be unable to maintain it. For their sakes, therefore, as well as your own, it behoves the members of your church to exert themselves on this occasion.

Besides the superior liberality of your sentiments in general, there is a frankness and candour in your *concessions*, that I have not found in any of my numerous opponents. You acknowledge that you do not find the doctrine of the divinity of Christ

Christ in the Old Testament; you are not very confident that you find it even in the New; and you make no difficulty at all of giving up the argument, so much insisted on by Dr. Horsley, from the writings of the apostolical fathers. "The figures," you say, p. 67, "the allusions, and the prophecies of the Old Testament, by themselves, present to the unprejudiced reader no explicit idea of the absolute divinity of the promised Messiah—and I must confess, if we had no other clue to guide us, I should be inclined to conclude the Messiah to be a mere man, though endowed with privileges above the rest of mankind. On New Testament ground I think I could make a firmer stand, and fight with you at least on equal terms. Among many ambiguous texts that may be urged against your system, there are certainly *three or four*, the force of which cannot easily be eluded. Witness the hard strainings that have been made by yourself, and your party, to give them a plausible Socinian interpretation; whilst they seem, at the very first sight, expressly calculated to justify the doctrine of your adversaries."

I wish that, in the prosecution of this argument, you would mention the *three or four texts*, on which you lay so much stress. In the mean time, I would ask, whether there be not many more than three or four, or even than three or four-score texts, which teach the great doctrine of the sole divinity of the Father, much more unequivocally

vocally than any of your three or four unnamed texts, do that of the divinity of the Son? I shall on this occasion, call to your recollection only a few of them. Matt. xix. 7. *Why callest thou me good. There is none good, but one, that is God.* Mark xii. 32. *There is one God, and there is none other but he.* John xvii. 3. *That they might know thee, the only true God.* Rom. xvi. 27. *To God only wise—through Jesus Christ.* Cor. viii. 6. *To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things, and we by him.* Eph. vi. 6. *One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God, and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* 1 Tim. ii. 5. *There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* Jude 4. *Denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

How often do we read of the God, as well as the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ? And is it not the uniform custom of the writers of the New Testament to name God and Christ as contradistinguished from each other? What hard straining, Sir, must it not require to give to any of the above-mentioned texts, which have not so much as the appearance of *ambiguity* in them, a plausible trinitarian interpretation?

You rest this great controversy, as far as it is to be decided by the scriptures, on *three or four* texts, and what appears to be their sense at *first sight* only.

only. But you know, Sir, that the true sense of many passages of scripture, as well as of other writings, is by no means what it seems to be at first sight, especially when the language is figurative; and that a comparison of them with other passages is often necessary to explain them. There cannot, therefore, appear even to yourself to be any great ground of confidence here. And I might well ask you, whether it be not extraordinary, that a doctrine of so great magnitude as that of the divinity of Christ, and which draws after it consequences of so much importance in practice, as well as theory (especially the worshipping of him as the supreme God; and which at first sight, you must acknowledge directly militates against the doctrine of the sole divinity of the *one God and Father of all*, expressly called *the God and Father of Jesus Christ himself*) should rest on three or four texts, of which you can only say that, at first sight, they appear to be in your favour.

The doctrine of *the unity of God* is unquestionably that of a thousand texts, and is implied in the whole tenor of scripture. This no person ever did, or can deny. And did not the doctrine of *three persons* in this godhead, if it be a truth, require to be declared in as explicit a manner, if it was meant to be inculcated at all? As to the divinity of Christ, an ingenious man would easily find as many plausible arguments for the divinity of Moses.

If the doctrine of the trinity be clearly taught in the scriptures, how comes it that yourself, "after reading the best Athanasian, Arian, and Socinian glossarists," could be, as you say, p. 11. "Athanasian, Arian, and Socinian, by turns?" This, Sir, is not my case. The Athanasian and Arian glossarists only make me a more confirmed Unitarian.

If adoration be really due to Christ from his followers, as you say, p. 4, why have we so little of either *precept*, or *example* of it in the scriptures? Could Origen have written so expressly as he has done against praying to Christ, if it had been the practice of christians from the earliest ages?

Of the writings of the apostolical Fathers, you frankly and justly say, p. 11, "some are lost, others imperfect, and others interpolated, and together afford but an ambiguous commentary on an ambiguous text."

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

Of the Nicene Council.

REV. SIR,

ON what, then, do you fix your foot, and what is the real ground of your faith in the doctrine for which you contend? When I had read the title page of your pamphlet, I for some time proceeded no farther, but amused myself with conjecturing what your great *prescriptive argument*; that argument which rendered all others unnecessary, might be; but really, Sir, all my conjectures were wide of the truth, for I own I should least of all have expected it where you imagine you have found it. But my readers shall hear yourself on the subject.

"In this dubiety," you say, p. 12, "I look about for something more explicitly satisfactory, and this I think I find in the formal decision of the Nicæan council." When I had discovered this, I was no less at a loss in conjecturing how any decision of such a council as that, called for such a purpose as that was, by such a person as Constantine, and especially at so great a distance of time from the age of the apostles, could at all answer, or even seem to answer, your purpose.

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On this subject you say, p. 14, "I ask you
 "whether you think it in the smallest degree pro-
 "bable, that three hundred and eighteen of the
 "principal pastors in the christian church, con-
 "voked from the three parts of the then known
 "world, could possibly combine to establish a doc-
 "trine different from that which they had hither-
 "to taught their respective flocks, and which they
 "had themselves received from their predeces-
 "sors in the ministry?—You must then, I think,
 "allow that, at this period, the belief of the di-
 "vinity of Jesus, was the universal belief of the
 "christian churches of Asia, Africa, and Europe."

This then, Sir, is what you call, p. 19, your
 "invincible prescriptive proof of the divinity of
 "Christ," and much *eloquence* you employ on the
 subject; but I own I see in it little of *argument*,
 or even of *plausibility*. For the greater perspicuity,
 I shall state my objections to what you have urged
 in a number of observations, that their strength,
 whether viewed separately or jointly, may be
 more distinctly seen; and at the same time, that if
 there be any latent fallacy in them, it may be
 more easily detected.

First, You call the Nicene Fathers, p. 18, "the
 "representatives of the whole christian church."
 Now, in my opinion, they represented the chris-
 tian church in no other sense than our House of
 Lords might be said to represent the English
 nation. There was no *House of Commons* in that
 assembly. There were none to speak the senti-
 ments

ments of the common people, which I have shewn at large, and from the acknowledgments of several of those Fathers themselves, to have been very different from theirs.

Secondly, This celebrated council, being held in the year 325, is too remote from the age of the apostles to be expected (considering the influences to which the learned christians had been exposed) to retain the primitive doctrine concerning Christ. The doctrines of Plato appear to have been in the christian church as early as the age of Justin Martyr, who wrote about A. D. 140. From that time almost all the learned christians imbibed them; and the consequence of this was such a rapid departure from the primitive doctrine, that we could not reasonably expect to find it among such bishops as were assembled at Nice in 325.

This consideration alone furnishes a sufficient answer to your irrefragable prescriptive argument. Had the council been held in the age immediately following that of the apostles, or had the learned christians confined themselves to the study of the scriptures, and known nothing of heathen philosophy; had no enemy sown tares among the good seed, your argument would have had some weight. But this council being held two centuries and an half after the age of the apostles, and near two centuries after the introduction of Platonism into christianity, I cannot allow it to have any weight at all.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, I need not remind you, Sir, who appear to know human nature, and mankind, very well, and who acknowledge, p. 12, that "the Fathers assembled at Nice were, both severally and conjunctly, an assembly of fallible men," that the inclination of the emperor (who appears by his speech to them to have been deeply tinctured with the doctrines of Plato) and that of those bishops who had his confidence, being well known, there would be a great leaning to their opinion; and that the more conscientious of those who, if they had attended, must have been under the disagreeable necessity of opposing it, would find excuses, and stay at home. Three hundred and eighteen was far from being the whole number of Christian bishops in that age.

Fourthly, If you consider the part that either Constantine himself, or the professed enemies of Arius, took in the business of this celebrated council, you must acknowledge that very little can be said for the *liberty* of it. I shall only call to your recollection a few circumstances mentioned by Tillemont, to whose authority, or impartiality, you will not object.

On declaring himself a Christian, Constantine was extremely desirous to promote the unity of the church, and for that purpose first wrote by Hosius to Alexandria on the subject. This measure not succeeding; at the earnest request of Hosius, and Alexander bishop of Alexandria, he summoned the

the council of Nice, but not till he had threatened the clergy among the followers of Arius with serving in the public offices, if they did not quit the society of so wicked a master, and agree to the pure faith of the church.

When Constantine came to the council he omitted nothing in his power to make the Fathers unanimous in their decisions. Many of the friends of Arius were induced to join in his condemnation for fear of banishment, to which Arius himself, and two of his firmer friends, were actually sent. After this the emperor ordered all the books of Arius to be burned, and those who concealed them to be put to death.. These are some of the particulars relating to the conduct of Constantine.

The greatest opposers of Arius, those who may be called his personal enemies, were Alexander, Athanasius, and Hosius. The last had presided in a council at Alexandria, in which Arius was condemned. Athanasius calls him the conductor of all the councils. Alexander had so much influence at the council of Nice, that he is said to have been the master of all things in it. Athanasius also had great weight there; and had it depended upon him, Arianism had been extinguished in it. Hosius composed the creed, but Athanasius himself assisted in it.

These, Sir, are only translations of different passages in the history that Tillemont gives of
the

the council of Nice. Do you then, who are not ignorant of human nature, or human affairs, say what chance Arianism, if it had been the truth, could have had in those circumstances, or how far a declaration agreeable to the genuine and primitive doctrines of christianity was to be expected from the Fathers at Nice.

Fifthly, In the very next reign, when the emperor was an Arian, there were as numerous assemblies of Arian bishops, in the same part of the world, as there were of Trinitarian ones at Nice; and a little before the council of Nice, there were assemblies of the clergy both in Bythynia, and Palestine, which Tillemont calls *councils*, which were in favour of Arius. So that, by the same mode of reasoning which you have adopted, it might be proved that Arianism was the primitive doctrine concerning Christ.

Sixthly, Your argument, admitting the justness of your medium of proof, will prove a great deal too much. For it will not only prove that the primitive doctrine was the divinity of Christ in general, but also that *kind* of divinity which those Fathers ascribed to him, a kind which I imagine that you, Sir, will not maintain; for it is not the present Catholic doctrine, and indeed soon ceased to be so, as I have shewn at large in my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*. Those Fathers universally held that the divinity of the Son was greatly inferior to that of the Father, and had its
origin

origin in the reason of the Father; which having been first in him as an *attribute*, afterwards became a *person*. Will you, or any person, at this day, maintain that *this* was the primitive doctrine concerning Christ, that which was held and taught by the apostles?

Seventhly, The council of Nice was held for the express purpose of the condemnation of one particular opinion, in which the Unitarians had no concern. It was to condemn the doctrine of Arius, who held that Christ was a creature, produced from nothing (*ἐκ τινος καὶ οὐκ ὄντος*) and that there was a time when he was not. In opposition to this, the Trinitarians held that the Son was no *creature*, but of the same substance (*ὁμοουσιος*) with the Father; and that, having been the proper *reason* of the Father, there could never have been any time in which he was not; for that then the Father would have been without reason. Such, you well know, was the reasoning of the time on the subject.

On these two opinions, the Unitarians could much more easily adopt the language of the Trinitarians, than that of the Arians. For many of them also had learned to philosophize, though not so much as the Trinitarians; and acknowledging, as all Unitarians do, that a divine power resided, and acted, in Christ, they said that this divine power was that of the Father, and therefore might be said to be the Father; who, being in Christ,

Christ, did the works by which his divine mission was evidenced. They therefore thought themselves authorized to say that the Father and the Son were one and the same, and of course *ομοουσιος*, or of the same substance. A Sabellian, therefore, might adopt the language of the council of Nice. This is acknowledged by the learned Beaufobre. And Marcellus of Ancyra did most vehemently oppose Arius in that council; a conduct which the Arians never forgave him.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

Of the State of Unitarianism in the primitive Times.

REV. SIR,

THE preceding observations, in my opinion, furnish a sufficient answer to your *irrefragable prescriptive argument*. But, to my great surprize, you farther say, p. 32. "If the divinity and pre-existence of Christ was not a tenet of primitive christianity, there must have been a period, prior to the Nicæan council, when it was accounted a heresy, and when the non-divinity was as universally taught, as the sole orthodox

“orthodox doctrine. Be pleased then to point
“out that period, and prove that it existed, not
“by negatives, presumptions, and arguments from
“improbability, but by clear positive testimony.
“For until you do this, I shall always consider
“the decision of the Nicæan synod as an irrefra-
“gable proof, that the divinity of our Lord was
“an original article of the Catholic faith.”

Again you say, p. 20. “I think you should
“have endeavoured, and been able, to shew when,
“and by whom, and in what manner, such an
“important revolution was brought about, who
“was the first broacher of the novel opinion, what
“opposition it met with, which of the apostolic
“sees was the first to embrace it, and by what
“wonderful influence it got possession of all the
“rest; without noise, without resistance, without
“any of those circumstances that always attend
“the introduction of a novelty in matters of re-
“ligion, especially when the contradictory of an
“established opinion is attempted to be intro-
“duced.”

Now all this, or as much of it as any reasonable
man can require, I have actually done, in my
History of early Opinions concerning Christ. By a
distinct exhibition of the doctrines of Platonism,
by an abundant proof of their having been adopted
by the christian Fathers, and from the near resem-
blance between them and the doctrine of the Trinity
in the first stage of it, I think I have made it most
evident,

evident, that it had that origin, and no other. No child ever proved its own parent more clearly than this does.

I have also shewn, in the fullest manner, that the Trinitarian doctrine was considered as an *innovation*, and that it gave the greatest offence to the common people, though, by the plausible representations, and frequent apologies, of the learned christians, they were kept tolerably quiet; till by means of the overbearing influence of the governing powers, and also that of the great see of Rome, all opposition to the novel doctrine had no effect; notwithstanding the strongest remonstrances did not fail to be made against it in every period.

I have shewn, Sir, that it was universally acknowledged by the christian Fathers, Antenicene Nicene, and Postnicene, that the first converts to christianity, Jews and Gentiles, were so firmly persuaded of the simple humanity of Christ, that the apostles themselves did not chuse to teach openly and clearly any other doctrine. I have shewn that those Unitarians were never considered as *Heretics*, notwithstanding their opinion differed so much from that which was held by those who afterwards appropriated to themselves the title of Catholic. I have produced a variety of other evidence, of the most satisfactory kind, to prove that the primitive christian church was Unitarian, and to no part of it have you so much as adverted in your Letter; so that in the idea of these Fathers,

the believers in the simple humanity of Christ were not *a few obscure sectaries*, as you call them, p. 5.

You make very light of the *Ebionites*, p. 16, But, according to the testimony of Origen, they were the whole body of Jewish christians, of whom some, he says, believed the miraculous conception of Jesus, and others did not, but none of them believed his divinity. Is their opinion and testimony to be esteemed of no value, when *ancient doctrines* are sought for? If this be not the *positive testimony* you require, what is so?

You do not even appear to be apprized of the great object of my work, which was not only to trace the rise and progress of the doctrine of the trinity, but also to shew that, though the learned christians, from Justin Martyr to the council of Nice, held the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, the greater part of the *common people* were believers in his simple humanity.

Besides, the more learned christians may easily be supposed to have departed from the primitive doctrine concerning Christ, as they were peculiarly exposed to influences, which must have operated very powerfully to produce that effect; whereas the common people were not subject to that dangerous influence, and therefore were much more likely to retain the original doctrine transmitted from the apostles, who certainly were not Platonists, and indeed could never have understood such

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a system

a system as that of the Nicene Fathers. Universal experience and observation shews, that *old opinions* are longest retained by the common people, and that *innovations* begin with the learned and speculative. These things, sir, you should have noticed, if you had proposed to make any effectual reply to my work.

I am not much less surprized at the following paragraph in your letter. "Is it not strange," you say, p. 23, "passing strange, that, in not one "of those assemblies" (viz. about forty councils held after that of Nice) "neither at Alexandria, nor Antioch, nor Cæsarea, nor Sardica, nor "Jerusalem, nor Constantinople, nor Sirmium, nor "Milan, nor Rome, nor Rimini, there should not "be a single voice raised in favour of Socinianism, "a single pen employed to defend it, a single "authority quoted in its support. And that while "the whole body of christians were engaged in a "controversy about two opinions, both equally "false, the only true dogma should be overlooked, "should be rejected, should be anathematized by "all? This I confess is to me inconceivable—is, "in the nature of things, hardly possible."

Had I not the most perfect confidence in your impartiality, and love of truth, I should have concluded from this paragraph, that you had not so much as *read* the work on which you have animadverted. I cannot help suspecting, however, that, imagining your *one prescriptive argument* to be

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abundantly

abundantly sufficient for your purpose, you contented yourself with giving but a slight attention to the greater part of my work; and that the few traces which the hasty perusal of it left in your mind were wholly effaced at the time of writing your *Letter* to me.

Nay, the surprize you express would have been precluded, if you had sufficiently attended to what you yourself justly say of the history of the times which followed the council of Nice, p. 22, viz. that "in them Arianism and Athanasianism alternately triumphed." Unitarianism was not the object of any of those councils, except those which were called on the account of Photinus, and we have no particulars of what passed in any of them. At that time the emperors, and leading bishops, were all either Arians or Athanasians; and having to combat with one another, they overlooked the Unitarians, whose party was then so low (not with respect to *numbers*, but to *rank* and *consideration*) that they had nothing to fear from them. How then is it *inconceivable*, that their opinions should be anathematized by both parties, when they were equally hostile to both.

To anticipate my reply to some part of the preceding paragraph, you add, p. 24, "You will say perhaps, that even at that time Socinianism was not intirely without its witnesses among the bishops themselves, and refer me to Paul of Antioch, and Photinus of Sirmium. That both

" these were in some measure Socinians, I grant;
 " but this serves only to give a greater degree of
 " strength to my argument. For in what light was
 " their doctrine considered by their fellow bishops,
 " and what were the consequences of their teaching
 " it? They were regarded as blasphemous inno-
 " vators, threatened with immediate deposition, and
 " excommunicated by both parties*. If you think
 " then that you can avail yourself of such a testi-
 " mony, you are welcome to use it; and you may
 " add all the other similar testimonies you can glean
 " through all the preceding ages, from Paul of
 " Antioch up to Cerinthus: all this, when put in
 " the balance with the testimony of the Nicæan
 " Fathers, to me appears a grain against an hundred
 " weight."

In this paragraph, and in this alone, you look
 back to the time preceding the council of Nice;
 and the state of things being very different in the
 different periods of that time, what you say does not
 apply to them all alike. The Unitarians were by
 no means considered in the same light from the age
 of Cerinthus, which was that of the apostles, to
 that of Paul of Antioch, and much less that of
 Photinus, though you make no difference in the
 case. In that of Cerinthus, and long after, they
 were so far from being considered, or treated, as
heretics, that it was universally acknowledged that
 Unitarianism was the only doctrine which the un-

* In the time of Paul of Antioch Arianism had no existence.
 learned

learned christians had been taught, even by the apostles themselves; and they were so far from being excommunicated, that by the confession of their adversaries, till the publication of John's gospel, after the destruction of Jerusalem, there was no other opinion among the common people. No creed, no sentence of any council, ever presumed to call them heretics. On the contrary, they boldly charged the Trinitarians, as soon as they appeared, notwithstanding all their apologies, and the art with which their doctrine was introduced, as *innovators* in the scheme of christianity. In the time of Tertullian the *major pars*, the *majority* of christians held this language, and the *πλῆθος*, *the multitude*, in the time of Athanasius.

If you even confine your attention to the *writers* in defence of Unitarinism, who always bear a very small proportion even to the reading and thinking part of any sect, and a still smaller to those who do not read and think, but follow the leading of others (which is the case with the great mass of all ranks of men) they will not appear so inconsiderable as you hastily represent them (especially as it is allowed that the generality of the learned christians were addicted to Platonism) beginning with Symmachus, and ending with Photinus, who, in the late age in which he lived, was so popular in his diocese, that three synods, under an Arian emperor, were necessary to expel him; and who continued writing to an advanced age, treating every doctrine except the Unitarian with just contempt. Among other treatises

tises he wrote one on the subject of *heresy*; and though, in the early ages, this term had been synonymous to *Gnosticism*, it is very possible that, as his enemies had treated him as an heretic, he, who appears to have had no dread of them, treated them as heretics in return.

Two synods were necessary to condemn even Paul of Antioch, and the power of the emperor was called in to expel him from the episcopal house, notwithstanding his accusation contained many articles besides matters of doctrine. It appeared probable to Dr. Lardner, that both Firmilian of Cappadocia, and the famous Gregory of Neocæsarea, favoured him. That the diocese of the latter swarmed with Unitarians, in a much later period, is evident from the epistles of Basil, which are very instructive, and give us a clear idea how unpopular, even among the clergy of those parts, were the great defenders of orthodoxy in that age. Low as you may think the Unitarian interest to have been after the council of Nice, I doubt not but that an Unitarian emperor, or perhaps an Unitarian pope, would soon have turned the scale in its favour. But it pleased divine providence that the genuine doctrine of the gospel should then have no support from such quarters; and that it should now revive by its own evidence, when all kings, all popes, and all bishops, are still against it.

“In the works of the Antenicene Fathers,” you say, p. 33, “whether genuine or spurious, there

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"is not, I think, besides the Clementine Romance,
"a single work that speaks directly the language
"of Socinus."

But you well know that many were *written*, and you cannot wonder that they are not now *extant*. Let not the orthodox reproach us with the want of that evidence which they may have been the means of suppressing.

Considering the time when the Clementine homilies were written, as early probably as the writings of Justin Martyr (in my opinion prior to them) much more may be inferred from them in favour of unitarianism than you seem willing to allow. The author of that work was a learned christian, and a fine writer, much superior to Justin Martyr. He discusses at great length the philosophical opinions of the apostolic age, which were then generally opposed to christianity, but which were afterwards incorporated into it. But he combats them solely on unitarian principles; and not only so, but without giving any hint of there being any other, held by christians, on which they were, or could be, combated; whereas the platonizing Fathers, who wrote against the same general principles, went upon quite different ground.

Now is it probable that so ingenious and learned a writer could do this, and be acquainted with any other mode of proceeding? Considering the

number of incidents, and discourses, introduced into that work, I think it highly probable that, if the writer had even known of such persons as platonizing christians, or their doctrine of the *logos*, he would have made some mention of it there; it had so near a connexion with his subject. I am therefore strongly inclined to suppose that he had never heard of such a writer as Justin Martyr, and that the doctrine of the *logos*, as the *reason of the Father*, which laid the foundation for the subsequent doctrine of the Trinity, as it is now held, had not been started in his time. Consequently, I am inclined to think, that when this work was composed, there were no classes of christians besides *Unitarians* and *Gnostics*.

When all these things (and many more you will find in my work) are considered, can you say, as you do, p. 25, that, "When the whole is put into the balance with the testimony of the Nicene Fathers, it is no more than a grain against an hundred weight?" Indeed, sir, the things that ought to have been weighed were either never put into the balance, or it was held by a very unequal hand.

I am, &c.

LETTER

REV. DR. GEDDES.

L E T T E R IV.

Of the Degree of Christ's Divinity, and the Conclusion.

REV. SIR,

I Cannot close these letters without animadverting upon another circumstance on which you touch much too slightly. "My task," you say, p. 5, "is barely to shew that the divinity of Jesus Christ was, in some sense or other, an original article of belief;" and again, p. 33. "In what precise sense I should understand his godhead, I might be puzzled to determine."

Had this language been addressed to the apostles, they would probably have replied, *Thou bringest strange things to our ears.* For they do not appear to me ever to have heard of such a thing, as *kinds, or degrees, of divinity.* In the scriptures nothing is said but of one kind of proper divinity. Mention is there made of *one true God*, and of *many false gods*, but of no *inferior kind of true God.* We read of *God*, and of *creatures*; but of nothing of an intermediate nature. Moses, indeed, and magistrates in general, are called gods, but it is only by way of figure. There was nothing divine in their *natures*; and in this sense all men may be termed gods, with respect to brute creatures. If
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this be all the divinity that you ascribe to Christ, I shall certainly have no objection to it. Being my lord and master, he is, in this sense, also my god; but in no other. But as he is never, in any sense, called *God* in the scriptures, I do not think myself authorized to use that language.

If therefore Christ be God at all, in the sense in which the sacred writers use the term God, he must have every essential attribute of divinity. He must be self-existent, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, and almighty, the maker and constant preserver of all things. Nay more, if more can be said, he must be *the one God and Father of all*, even the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. For the scriptures know no other God besides this.

The whole doctrine of *inferior gods*, such as the platonizing Fathers made Christ to be, is downright *beatben*, and a manifest departure from *the faith* originally delivered to the saints. According to this true faith, there is but *one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man* (not the inferior God) *Christ Jesus*. But from being an inferior God, in the space of about two centuries (for it required that time to advance such a step) this inferior God, became, in the imagination of christians, to be God equal to the Father.

Shocked at this sentiment, learned christians seem now to be very generally endeavouring to get

get back to the doctrine of an *inferior God*, and for this purpose some become Arians, and others endeavour to make out *kinds and degrees in divinity*, as there are kinds and degrees among creatures. But reason and common sense revolt at the supposition; and be assured, the christian world will not be able to find any rest, till they go back to the primitive doctrine of *one God*, and of *men approved of God*, by signs and wonders which God did by them. I believe Christ to be *a prophet mighty in word and deed*, a man whom God sent, by whom God spake, whom God raised from the dead, and who will come again in the glory and power of God his Father, to raise the dead, to judge the world, and to give to every man according to his works.

This, Sir, is the christianity which I profess, and it is a religion as plain as it is practical. It is worthy of God, and approves itself to the reason of man. And why should we be fond of a *faith* with which *reason* is at variance, and to which it must be sacrificed? Is this a sacrifice pleasing to God? Can we wonder at the number of sensible unbelievers in the Christian world, when they find that they must abandon their reason before they can adopt religion, which is the case when such doctrines as the Trinity (that of three divine persons in one God) are held out to them, and they are told that they cannot be christians without receiving them? While this is our conduct, with one hand we invite men to come within the
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pale of the church, while with the other we shut the door against them. This door, I wish to throw fairly open, and therefore I invite men to bring their reason with them when they become christians, and by no means to leave it behind them.

Far would I be from drawing off your attention from the *great work* in which you are engaged, and from which I have the greatest expectations, in consequence of believing you to be singularly qualified for it. Your *Prospectus*, which I read with wonder and delight, is a pledge of it. But if you could find leisure, I could wish that you would at least attempt the execution of what you suppose may be done, when you say, p. 34. "It would not, I imagine, be a very difficult, " though it would be a tedious task, to refute all " the arguments, and answer all the objections, " which your party have been long employed in " collecting, from those store-houses (the christian Fathers) and which you, Sir, have summed " up in so masterly a manner in your last great " work. With abilities far inferior to yours, I " could, if at leisure, erect, from the same materials, out of which you have reared so specious an edifice, a fabric of a different order, as " plausible I trust, and compact as yours, without " being under the suspicious necessity of garbling " and rejecting as you have done."

This language, Sir, is by no means of a piece
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with the liberality of the rest of your letter, and should not have been used without proof. Many a tedious volume as I have *looked through*, at least a hundred folios, Greek or Latin, without counting those of smaller size, I am not conscious of having, in any proper sense of the word, *garbled* any of them, or of having *rejected* any thing that could throw light on my subject, whether it made for or against me; though I may have *overlooked* passages of both kinds. On this account, I most sincerely wish that others may go over the same ground after me, and with more discerning eyes.

As you think, however, that, without taking so much trouble, the materials that I have collected would serve to construct a fabric of a different nature, I wish you would try to make them answer the purpose you mention. But I am confident you might as soon take down the elegant cylindrical monument in Grace Church-street, and with the same stones erect a parallelopedion. If you should not be able to command sufficient leisure yourself, I wish you would persuade some other learned person of your communion to undertake the work, and assist him with your counsel.

As I believe you to be a man of a truly candid and ingenuous mind, and that you really write as I do, for the sake of promoting truth, I flatter myself that you will not fail to let me, and the public, hear from you again on the subject. If you feel any force in my reply, have the honest courage to
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acknowledge it. If not, let us know what armour it is that defends you. In this I ask no more than I hold myself ready to give to you, or any other of my opponents. It is what all writers owe to that most respectable tribunal, before which we are pleading, the christian world. We ought, therefore, to acknowledge our cause to be untenable, if we think it to be so, as well as to defend it while we think it defensible. As for myself, like an honest general, successful or unsuccessful, I will give as fair an account of my *killed and wounded*, as of the *trophies* I may gain, or the *prisoners* I may take.

With the truest respect, I am,

Rev. Sir,

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

BIRMINGHAM,

DECEMBER, 1787.

L E T T E R S

TO THE

REV. DR. PRICE.



TO THE
REV. DR. PRICE.

L E T T E R I.

*Of the Influence of the Doctrine of philosophical
Necessity on that concerning the Person of Christ.*

DEAR FRIEND,

I CANNOT forbear acknowledging the satisfaction I have received from the perusal of the *Appendix* to your late Sermons, in which, with a candour that does you the greatest honour, you have, as you say, p. 371; "stated some of the "most important of Dr. Priestley's arguments, that "our readers may be able to form their judgment "on the points about which we differ."

It is, I believe, our joint and earnest wish, that the public may form a right judgment in the case; and therefore I shall, without any apology, make a few remarks upon the view that you have given of my arguments. On several of the heads you have contented yourself with simply reciting them,
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and, with an almost unexampled generosity, have left them, without making any reply, to make what impression they may upon our readers. In other cases you have been led, perhaps unintentionally, farther into the controversy, and in these I shall take the liberty to accompany you.

You say, p. 374, that you and I cannot agree on the subject of the *creation of all things by Christ*, because I suppose that "there is but *one proper agent* " *in nature*; the whole being a piece of machinery "depending upon the sole will of that great Being "who framed the whole, and put it in motion." This I do indeed acknowledge, and I consider it as a great and glorious truth, without which all would be darkness, confusion, and despair. But it appears to me that this has nothing at all to do with our present discussion; because, as Arians or Unitarians, the question between us is simply whether the volitions of Christ (originating in himself or in another) gave birth to the universe.

You may as well say that you and I can never agree about the author of any particular book, your own Sermons, for instance; for that, if there be but one agent in the universe, *he* was the only proper author of them. But upon this principle, he was also the author of my remarks upon them. Admitting that there is a sense in which God is the author of every thing, good and evil, there is likewise a certain and definite sense, in which there are other, and very different agents, and which will

will allow us to say that your *Sermons* were written by *you*, and my *remarks* on them by *me*.

Now it is only in this sense that we are to consider whether Christ made the world; and I may as well say that he did *not* make it, believing that it existed before he himself was made, as you that he *did* make it, believing as you do, that he existed before it was made, and that his volitions and exertions were, in some way or other, instrumental in making it. Here, therefore, is a clear ground of argument and discussion between us, and my being an advocate for the doctrine of philosophical necessity, and you for that of philosophical liberty, has nothing to do with it. The one is a question between us as *metaphysicians*, and the other as *theologians*. Do not, therefore say, as you do, p. 375, "that on *this account*, it is impossible that we should think alike of the nature and dignity of Christ, and of the importance of his agency." You must know that, notwithstanding every difference in this respect, many persons have thought alike on this subject; many Necessarians having been Arians, and many of their opponents Unitarians.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Of the Propriety of praying to Christ on Arian Principles.

DEAR FRIENDS,

I HAD maintained that, upon the Arian principles, which you defend, Christ ought to be considered as a proper object of *religious worship*. "This," you say, p. 374, "I asserted on the supposition that a believer of this doctrine believes also the creation of this world, and all its dependencies by Christ, in such a sense as to imply that *he supports all things by the word of his power*,"—that he is always present with us, &c. But you add that, "he who will consider what I have said on the subject of the formation of the world by Christ, p. 143, &c. will find that I have no such ideas as these."

That I should be thought to have, in any respect, misstated your opinion, or to have drawn any unfair conclusion from it, gave me much concern, because both were equally remote from my intention. But after a careful perusal of your Sermons, I must own that I cannot help seeing them in the same light; and therefore being of opinion, that what you advanced will fully authorize the conclusion I then drew from it.

In p. 140 and 141, you apply to Christ what is said in Heb. i. 1, &c. John i. 1, &c. and Coll. i. 6, &c. Now in the first of these passages it is expressly said that *he upholds all things by the word of his power*; and whether you understand this of his own proper power, or that of God his Father, it certainly implies his constant inspection of, and intimate presence with, every thing that he has made; which you say comprehends this world, and all its dependencies.

In the second passage, not only is it said that *all things were made by him* (i. e. the logos) and *without him was not any thing made that was made*, but that *in him was life, and the life was the light of men*. And in the last of the three passages it is said that Christ is *before all things*, and *by him all things consist*.

Surely then in them is contained, even *totidem verbis*, the very præposition which you so strongly disclaim; so that, admitting the creation of the world by Christ, I do not see how you can hesitate to admit that *he upholdeth all things by the word of his power*, that he is the *giver of life*, and that *by him all things consist*; and consequently that he is possessed of every attribute that is requisite to constitute him a proper object of religious worship, viz. omniscience, and a capacity to supply all our wants. He must be able to hear and answer all our prayers.

Besides, the sacred writers always ascribe the *government* of the world to the *maker* of it, whoever he be. The same Being is our *maker*, and *preserver*, and we are expressly required to *worship*, and *bow down*, and *kneel* before him, as such. In whatever sense, therefore, it be true that Christ is our *maker*, in the same sense he must be our *governor*, *preserver*, and *benefactor*, and therefore justly entitled to what we call *religious homage*.

You say, indeed, p. 382, "It should not be
 "forgotten that by religious worship I mean
 "prayer addressed to an invisible Being, supposed
 "always present with us, and the disposer of our
 "lot. The honour, obedience, and gratitude,
 "therefore, which we owe to Christ do not amount
 "to religious worship. The former is a part of
 "our duty as christians. The latter we ought to
 "confine to that one invisible Being, who is the
 "supreme disposer of the lots of all beings, and
 "of whom we know that he is a constant witness
 "to our thoughts and wishes."

Now, upon the Arian hypothesis, must not Christ, who actually made Adam and all men, and who, though in a manner incomprehensible, and invisible to us, *supports all things by the word of his power*, be always, and most intimately present with us? And *having all power both in heaven and in earth*, though as the gift of God, is he not the immediate disposer of our lot. That he is not the *supreme*, and *ultimate* disposer of it, does not
 exclude

exclude him from being the proper object of our addresses. If so, a child ought never to have recourse to his own father, but to God only, on whom both himself and his father depend.

Accordingly, the propriety and obligation of praying to Christ has been actually felt, and acknowledged, by all Arians till the present times. They have always paid him a worship which they usually termed *mediatorial*, to distinguish it from that which they conceived to be appropriated to his God and Father. I am informed that it was the constant practice of as reputable a person as any among the Arians, or any christian ministers now living, I mean Mr. Micaiah Twogood of Exeter, to address a prayer to Christ whenever he administered the Lord's Supper. In this he acted in perfect consistency with his principles. For why should he not pray to a Being who, he believed (though as the instrument, and by the command of God) actually made and supports him, who must, of course, though invisible, be present to him, and who is to be his final judge.

I must therefore maintain, that it is the necessary consequence of Arian principles, that Christ be considered as the proper object of religious worship, and that his not being proposed to us in that character by the sacred writers, is a proof that they were not Arians; and that however we may now understand their language, they did not really

mean to say that he was the maker of the visible world; and consequently that this is no genuine doctrine of revelation.

Since then Christ, on the principles of Arianism, is both the proper object of religious worship, and also expressly called *God*, even that God *by whom all things were made*; I cannot help saying that Arians believe in more Gods than one, and therefore that they are by no means intitled to the appellation of *Unitarians*. All that you can say is that one of your Gods is subordinate to the other. But such was also the belief of the Pagans; and upon this principle *they* might disclaim the appellation of *Polytheists*, or *Idolaters*. When the *logos* is called *God*, it is evidently in a very different sense from that in which Moses is called a God to Pharaoh, or in which men may be called Gods with respect to brute animals. There is no *comparison*, or figure of speech, implied in the former case, as there evidently is in the latter. The *logos* is truly and properly God, both in *name* and *power*.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R III.

Of the Silence of the three first Evangelists concerning the Doctrine of the Incarnation, and of the Doctrine of the primitive Ages of Christianity.

DEAR FRIEND,

I Am rather surprized that you, who do not pretend to believe the universal inspiration, or the infallibility, of the apostles, should lay so much stress as you do on the literal interpretation of a very few particular passages in their writings, and at the same time overlook *general considerations*, suggested by their writings, which appear to me to be of infinitely more moment in deciding the question between us. The silence of the three first evangelists on the subject of the incarnation of Christ must appear, if properly attended to, of more real consequence in supporting my opinion than a hundred such particular texts as you allege can be in support of yours. Only ask yourself, whether, with your present ideas on the subject, you could sit down, and deliberately write an account of Christ, for the use of strangers and posterity, without ever calling him any thing more than a *man*, or a *prophet*, and without saying any thing of his incarnation; when you knew (as the evangelists must have done) that to the persons for whose use you

wrote

wrote, the doctrine must have been absolutely novel, and must have appeared in the highest degree wonderful. And yet, of all the evangelists, it is John only who, without expressly asserting it, is thought to *allude* to this astonishing circumstance relating to their common master, a circumstance which, in the opinion of all Arians, does him such infinite honour, and exhibits the christian scheme to such advantage, that every thing short of it is considered as little better than deism.

Without this doctrine you Arians even think the force of Christ's example to be greatly lessened. "His quitting his pre-existent dignity, and degrading himself to the condition of mortal man, in order to save men;" you consider, p. 153, as "an instance of benevolence to which we can conceive no parallel, and which is probably the admiration of angels." And yet you will not find even in John, that our Saviour makes any merit of this condescension, as an instance of his love for the human race; though it is evident he did not wish to conceal any circumstance that would tend to enhance the value of it in the esteem of his disciples. For he, justly and repeatedly, enlarges on the greatness of his love for them. Now what is it that he himself mentions as the greatest evidence of it? It is his laying down his life for them, which is what any other man might have done, and which we are expressly required, by his example, to do for one another. But what was all this, in your idea, to his quitting his pre-existent dignity?

dignity? The bishop of Clogher, after describing the humiliation of Christ in assuming a human body, says, "the dreadfulnefs of the state to which he thereby reduced himself is hardly conceivable to us, because we were never sensible of any thing better than our present existence. For any being, which had ever enjoyed the happiness of heaven, and had been in possession of *glory with the Father*, to be deprived thereof, and to be sent to dwell here, in this world, encompassed within the narrow limits of this earthly tabernacle, and the heavy organs made of flesh and blood, it must, literally speaking, be, to such a being, a hell upon earth."

But why do we find nothing of this in the evangelists? If you will look into an excellent article lately published in the *Theological Repository*, you will see that, much as we read in the scriptures concerning the love of Christ to us, and also concerning our love to him, the ground of it is never said to be that with which you feel yourself so deeply impressed, p. 155. This writer examines every text in which mention is made of the love of Christ, through the whole of the New Testament, and he nowhere finds any mention of, or allusion to, a greater ground for it than his love to us, manifested by his suffering and dying for us. Could the greater ground that strikes your imagination so much, viz. his condescension to become incarnate for us, have been overlooked by all these writers, if, in their idea, this great event had ever taken place?

place? Your own feelings and conduct demonstrate it to be impossible.

In one single passage indeed, 2 Cor. viii. 9. we read, *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich.* But the phrases *being rich*, and *being poor*, are not synonymous to a state of *pre-existent glory* on the one hand, and a voluntary *abdication* of it, on the other, though such an interpretation suits your hypothesis. Unitarians, you know, think the passage admits of a different and more natural interpretation, agreeable to their principles. At any rate, however, you would never rest a doctrine of this magnitude on the supposed meaning of a single expression, manifestly figurative.

Consider also the near connexion, there is between the supposed *miraculous conception* of Christ and his *incarnation*, and say whether it be at all probable, that any person professing to write the history of the former, as Luke does, and Matthew is supposed to do, should relate the particulars of it, and not mention the latter, if they had known any thing of it? Do any Arians, even now (without writing a regular history of Christ, but only incidentally mentioning the subject, as in sermons and other discourses) ever speak of this body miraculously prepared for him, without mentioning the dignity of the inhabitant for whom it was prepared? If you attend to the subject, the silence of
these

these two evangelists concerning the doctrine of incarnation cannot but appear extraordinary, even to yourself. In my opinion, Mark could not have failed to have mentioned the miraculous conception in his history of Christ, had he ever heard of *that*, and much less would any of the evangelists have suppressed the mention of so much more wonderful a circumstance relating to their master, as that of his *incarnation*, if they had known any thing about it.

“How important,” you also very naturally say, p. 115, “must be the service which Christ, as a being of a very superior nature to man, came to perform.” And yet it is never described in terms that give us an idea of its being more than any other man might have performed. He preached, he declared the will of God, and performed miracles in his name (at the same time expressly declaring what, according to your system, must have been an equivocation that *he could do nothing of himself*, and that *the Father within him did the works*) and lastly he died, and by the power of God his Father he was raised from the dead. Now is not all this predicable of a *man*, and does it not best suit the character of a *man*, a *man*, as Peter calls him, *approved of God, by signs, and wonders, which God did by him?*

Permit me now to make use of another argument, and though you may think it has no great weight,

weight, yet appears to me to have much more than the literal interpretation of a hundred such particular texts as those on which you lay so much stress. It is well known that *ideas* frequently recurring to the mind will soon find proper corresponding *terms*. This was the case with the doctrine of the *trinity*, that of *transubstantiation*, and many others. Here you agree with me that the *doctrines*, and the corresponding *terms* made their appearance about the same time, and that this circumstance is a proof of the novelty of those doctrines with respect to the age of the apostles? Now is not the argument just as good when applied to the doctrine of *incarnation* in general. If John's phraseology of the *word becoming flesh* had been generally understood to mean the assumption of a human body by a superangelic spirit, it would not have long remained in that state of *circumlocution*. Had the idea been on the minds of christians in the whole of the apostolic age, as much as it was in the third and fourth centuries, and as it is upon your own mind at present, it could not have failed, in my opinion, very soon to have produced the more concise and expressive term *incarnation*. It would soon have been the burden of the song with both the enemies and the friends of christianity. But no such thing appears, though we find it immediately on the Platonizing fathers having got the notion of a *personified logos*.

No such terms as *personified logos*, or *incarnation*, are to be found in the writings of the apostles.

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Whenever they speak of Christ they always call him *a man*; and certainly the term *superangelic being*, or some equivalent expression would have escaped them some time or other, if they had conceived it to be applicable to him. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of him as, in his *nature*, *a little lower than the angels* (quoting from the Psalmist an expression applied to men in general) though he speaks of him as in *dignity* advanced far above them. Now would he not as readily have said that he was in nature, as well as in rank and pre-eminence, by divine appointment, superior to angels, if he had really thought him to be so? Some of Paul's epistles were written near thirty years after he had devoted his whole time to the propagation of the gospel, and there are other writings in the New Testament of a still later date; and yet in none of them do you find the proper term by which you now express the most wonderful, and the most important doctrine of the christian system. Is there nothing extraordinary in this, if the doctrine be really true?

But the argument to which I wish more particularly to draw the attention of learned christians, is that which I derive from the state of things in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles; considering the opinion of the great body of christians, in that early age, as one good method of ascertaining what was the doctrine of the apostles, and consequently the true sense of their writings. Now I maintain, that no such opinion

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as that for which you contend had any existence till the beginning of the fourth century. Before that time, viz. about the beginning of the second century, the Platonizing christians had adopted the idea of the divinity of Christ, as the *personified, but uncreated, logos of the Father*, united to a human body and a human soul, while the common people held the original doctrine of the *simple humanity* of Christ; but I assert that your opinion, viz. that the intelligent principle in Christ was of a *superangelic nature*, and yet *created out of nothing*, that it superseded the use of a proper *human soul*, and that such a created being was the creator of the world under God, ~~was~~ not adopted by any sect of christians whatever, learned or unlearned, till about the time of Arius. And could the true doctrine of the apostles have been immediately lost, and have remained unknown to all the christian world, from their time till so late a period? In all this time were there no christians who understood the true sense of the scriptures on a subject, which was the universal topic of discussion, as it has been from that age to this day? On this topic, I have long called for the reply of learned Arians, of this and other countries, but hitherto I have called in vain.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Of Agruments from particular Texts, and those drawn from the Reason of Things; and of the Connexion between any Opinion concerning the Person of Christ and the Belief of Christianity in general.

DEAR FRIEND,

YOU are pleased to say, p. 391, that mine is the only Socinian hypothesis which you could adopt, if you were to leave your present sentiments, without rejecting christianity. I cannot wonder at this, because it appears to me to be by far the most rational system of christianity, and being the most *defensible*, it is such as those who hold it, are the least likely to give up. But I see nothing of the *superior sense in discerning*, or the *superior candour in acknowledging it*, which you ascribe to me. It is only discerning and acknowledging that a man is a man, that without divine illumination one man could not *know* more than any other man, and that without supernatural assistance he could not *do* more than another man.

So far am I from thinking that it requires any *torturing of the scriptures*, to make them speak
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this language concerning Christ, that I think it is the only sense that can be put upon them without torture. It is the only one that is agreeable to the uniform tenor of them. On the contrary, your opinion of one man being the maker of the world, and of all other men, though I once believed it myself, now appears to me a most extravagant hypothesis, answering no purpose but that of giving a literal interpretation to a very few texts, which much more naturally admit a different construction. For you must know that, in many cases, the *literal* interpretation of an expression is the most *unnatural* of all others.

If you look off from those *few texts*, and attend to the *reason of things*, which is better than a hundred commentators, you cannot so much as imagine any reason why the redemption of mankind from *superstition* and *sin*, with its attendant *death* (which is the only redemption that is spoken of in the scriptures) should require the incarnation of such a being as your *logos*; and you give up many advantages which arise from the idea of a man like ourselves being employed as a messenger from God to man. In my opinion, the Trinitarian doctrine is much more plausibly supported both by passages of scripture (for its advocates quote ten for your one) and by reason; as they allege that *sin*, being of an infinite magnitude, requires an infinite satisfaction; so that your *logos*, or even Dr. Clarke's, the eternal creator of the whole universe, was unequal to it.

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To you, I know, I need to make no apology for this freedom; and I am persuaded you will bear with me if I say farther, that as the Arian hypothesis rose considerably later than the Trinitarian, so I doubt not it will vanish before it. I do not expect to see the extinction of the Trinitarian doctrine, because it has got such hold of the common people, and has also the support of the civil powers; but, according to the course of nature, I may hope to see an Arian considered as a rare phenomenon.

You have done me justice, and yourself credit, by producing at length my arguments for supposing that by the power given to Christ, of raising the dead, and judging the world, nothing more was meant than such a power as might have been imparted to any other man. But I wish you had offered something in reply to them before you had pronounced, as you do, p. 392, that my scheme is "such as cannot be admitted without either torturing the scriptures, or renouncing their authority."

In my opinion, and that of many others, what you have quoted from my *Letters* is an easy and natural account of the phraseology on which you build so much, and an illustration of it by its actual use on different occasions. For this I appeal to our common readers; as also whether the insinuation of any danger of renouncing the

authority of the scriptures ought to have been thrown out so lightly. For it may be supposed that, in your serious opinion, the belief of christianity itself is incompatible with my idea of it.

Indeed, my friend, we are not qualified to judge for one another in this case. Otherwise, considering how incredible your doctrine appears to me, viz. that of a created being, in the form of a man, and not at all distinguishable from other men by any visible property or circumstance whatever (one who was born and died; who ate, drank, and slept, like other men, and who did nothing that any other man, equally aided by God, might not have done) being the creator of the world, that I might be tempted to say that no scheme can be true which supposes it. For it is not possible that your mind should more revolt at my opinion, than mine does at yours.

But I check myself before I draw any such conclusion. For the plain historical evidence of the certainty of those facts which establish the truth of christianity, is so very clear and strong, that though I should see that the belief of them would draw after it the belief of that doctrine, I should not hesitate to embrace it; so that I should very contentedly, and thankfully, be an Arian rather than no christian. Indeed, so unspeakably valuable is the great hope of the gospel, the revelation of a future life, that I would admit almost the whole system of popery, and shut my eyes to every thing that only appeared

appeared *incomprehensible*, and not an absolute *contradiction*, rather than abandon it. And notwithstanding what you have here, and elsewhere incautiously dropped, I am confident, you would consent to be not only almost, but altogether, what I am, an Unitarian, a Necessarian, and even a Materialist, rather than no christian at all. By this time you must have seen that I am far from being singular in my opinions; and you cannot say that *as yet* there appears any ground of apprehension from them. Of the dead we may speak, and where was there a better christian than Dr. Jebb?

But though with myself, and some others, who were both educated christians, and have given particular attention to the evidences of christianity, they will preponderate against these difficulties, it may not be the case with all. Many persons will very naturally first consider what is proposed to them, before they give any attention to the *evidence* for it at all; and when they are told that, if they embrace christianity they must believe that the world was made by an inhabitant of Judea (for in that light, however the thing may be disguised, and softened, to your mind, it will appear to them) it is very possible the business may end there, and they may inquire no farther about it. If this be made a necessary preliminary, I am satisfied, from my own observations, that we must for ever despair of the conversion of the Jews.

This was not the case with Arianism when it was started. For it found the world in the belief of *pre-existence* and *incarnation*; so that neither philosophers, nor the vulgar, saw any thing to object to it on that account. But the case is widely different now.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Of the Meaning of John vi. 32, and of Christ divesting himself of the Power of working Miracles.

DEAR FRIEND,

YOU say, p. 392, that John vi. 32, *What and if you should see the Son of man ascend up where he was before*, "is as decisive a declaration of Christ's *pre-existence* as words can well express." But the phrases *this is my body*, and *except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you*, are as express declarations of the doctrine of transubstantiation. Also what our Lord says of the *Comforter*, literally interpreted, is as express a declaration of the personality of the Holy Spirit. And yet you receive neither of these doctrines. He says, John xvi. 7. 13. *If I depart I will*

will send him unto you, and he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. On your principle, of literal interpretation, we have here an account of a person clearly distinct from God, or Christ.

If we will allow of no figures of speech, in such books as those of scripture, we must admit the greatest absurdities. And you cannot feel more reluctance to admit the figurative interpretation of this passage in John, than Luther felt to give a similar interpretation to those passages which seem to assert the real presence of Christ in the eucharist; as you may see in the *History of the Reformation by Beausobre*, a work which I have just perused with the greatest satisfaction.

On Carolstadt's defending the doctrine of Zuinglius on the subject of the eucharist, he said, "Two persons wrote to me on the same subject, and even treated it with more ability than Carolstadt, not torturing the words of scripture as he did; but I find that I am taken, and have no way to escape. For the text of the evangelist is too plain, and too express, to admit of any other sense." Vol. iii. p. 124. And when the Landgrave proposed a conference at Marpurg between the German and Swiss divines on the subject, Luther premised that he would not depart from "the literal sense of the words *This is my body*,

“because, they appeared too clear, and express, to admit any other, and, that he would not hear sense, or reason, when God had spoken.” Vol. iv. p. 148.

The whole discourse in which this expression, on which you lay so much stress, occurs, is full of the strongest figures. For good reasons, no doubt, our Lord seems to have intended by it to stagger and confound his hearers. All the disciples, except the twelve, absolutely left him upon it, and even they were in great danger of being offended. And it is an expression in this very enigmatical discourse (continued indeed, but in the same strain, after the multitude had left him) a discourse in which nothing is expressed in a natural manner, that you insist must be interpreted literally.

Besides, the literal interpretation of this very passage, does not in reality accord with the sentiments of Arians, or of any sect of christians, except those of the Polish Socinians. For it would imply that the *human nature of Christ* had been in heaven; because it is said, not that the *Son of God*, but that *the Son of man* had been there. Besides, the phrase *where he was before*, is not synonymous to *heaven*, nor is the *time* when the Son of man was there, or any where else, mentioned in this passage; so that much must be *supplied* before it can be made to say much to your purpose.

Though I reject your interpretation of this text, I do not pretend to be quite satisfied with any other interpretation

interpretation of it. I am, however, abundantly satisfied that yours is not the true one. And this is far from being the only text about which the best critics cannot entirely please themselves. For my part, I should much sooner have recourse to the idea of Christ's actual ascent into heaven, or of his imagining that he had been carried up thither, in a vision, which (like that of Paul) he had ^{not} been able to distinguish from a reality, at the time that he received his commission, than to yours, of his having existed in an unembodied state before the creation of the world, and his having left some state of great dignity and happiness, when he came hither.

That this hypothesis is no proper clue to our Lord's real meaning, is I think sufficiently evident, from the utter impossibility of the apostles understanding him to mean any such thing. For, no doubt, they, at that time, considered their master, though the Messiah, as a mere man, who had no more pre-existed than they themselves had.

I cannot help observing, on this occasion, that neither yourself, nor any other person, has attempted any solution of the difficulty I suggested, from the silence of the writers of the New Testament with respect to the discovery of the pre-existent dignity of Christ, whenever it was made to them. To have been informed that Jesus, with whom they had lived in the greatest intimacy, as a *brother*, was their *maker*, must have astonished them as much as
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if they had been told that John the Baptist had been that great superangelic being; because they were no more prepared to receive the one than the other. But what traces do you perceive of the apostles being impressed as they must necessarily have been, upon the discovery of a thing of so extraordinary a nature? How must such an opinion have been ridiculed by the unbelieving Jews. And what marks do we find, in the Acts of the Apostles, of their having so much as heard of such an opinion being advanced by any christians? It is as evident from this consideration as any negative can be, that no such opinion as that of Christ having been the maker of the world, was ever taught by the apostles; and therefore any interpretation of their writings, which implies their teaching it, must be wrong, whether we be able to hit upon the true sense of them or not.

To be explicit with you, I would not, as you say, p. 394. "build an article of faith of such magnitude, on the correctness of John's recollection, and representation, of our Lord's language." So strange and incredible does your hypothesis appear to me, that rather than admit it, I would suppose the whole verse to be an interpolation, or that the old apostle dictated one thing, and his amanuensis wrote another. For you would not scruple to say as much if you had found any passage, in which it was said that Moses, or any of the old prophets, had been the maker of the world.

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As to the difficulty which you suggest, p. 396, about Christ, divesting himself of his power of working miracles, when he never properly had any such power (which in your excellent sermon on the resurrection of Lazarus, you yourself admit) it is, in my apprehension, no difficulty at all. Had Jesus (to suppose an impossibility) been inclined to exert a miraculous power of an improper kind, or at an improper season, I have no doubt but that his inclination would have been over-ruled, by that great Being by whose power alone he acknowledged that the miracles were wrought. But when his will perfectly coincided with that of his Father, it is not at all extraordinary, that he should be said to *renounce* a power which he had exercised, when he only ceased to request the farther use of it, from a full conviction that it ought not to be exercised any longer.

You say, p. 396. that "the gospel history gives us reason for believing that Christ possessed a power of working miracles more permanently, as well as in a higher degree, through the spirit which was given him without measure." But still, if it was *through the spirit which was given to him*, it was no power of *his own*, and is therefore no argument for his pre-existent dignity, and superior nature, but the contrary. For the same *might* have been imparted to any other man. Nay he himself does virtually assert as much, when he says, that when he should be removed from them, his apostles would do greater things than he had done.

done. For if they did greater things, they must have had greater power. If one passage must be interpreted literally, why not another? Have Arians the exclusive privilege of chusing what texts to interpret literally, and what figuratively?

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Of the Influence of Prejudice and Imagination in interpreting Scripture,

DEAR FRIEND,

IN reading the history of controversies, which tends to throw great light on the principles of human nature, and the human mind, we are perpetually astonished at the gross mistakes of very able and very honest men. But the wonder always arises, from our not placing ourselves precisely in their situation, and especially from our not considering the *fixed principles* they had acquired in their earliest years. Nothing surprises Protestants of the present day more than the difficulty with which the doctrine of transubstantiation was abandoned by the first reformers, an example

ample of which we have in the conduct of Luther mentioned above. But whatever a man's fixed principles are, and however they were acquired, he argues from them as indubitable maxims, and likewise interprets scripture by them.

Luther's conduct (however it may appear to us who were not educated with his prejudices) in his obstinately adhering to the literal interpretation of the words of Christ, is more excuseable than that of the Arians, with respect to the doctrine of *creation by Christ*; because it is well known, that the term *creation* is used in the scriptures in two senses, one of which implies nothing more than a *renovation*, or *change*; as when men are said to be *created anew in Christ Jesus*, and God is said to *create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy*. Consequently, we are not obliged by the use of any word, in the scripture sense of it, to suppose that Christ properly created any thing. And though the word *logos* is applied to Christ in the book of Revelation, where he is, or at least is supposed to be, meant by the person *whose name is called the word of God*, yet when the *word of God* is said to *create* any thing, it is never to be understood of Christ, but of the power of the Father only, as when it is said that *by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth*.

On this account, I cannot help considering your literal interpretation of those texts, which ascribe

ascribe the creation of the material world to Christ as, in reality, *unnatural*. I cannot, however, help approving of your conduct in one respect, viz. in connecting the doctrine of the *pre-existence* of Christ, with that of his *creation of all things*. For certainly the same texts of scripture prove both, or neither. Besides, if no great office be ascribed to him before his incarnation, it cannot be known whether he was any thing more than a human soul, for which no body had been immediately provided (and which, according to your idea of an unembodied soul, was altogether incapable of action, or even sensation) so that all the *sublime* of the scheme, that which recommends it to many, absolutely vanishes.

There is in every general *scheme of christianity*, (as you call the doctrine concerning the person of Christ) something that forcibly strikes the imagination; some *leading principle*, or maxim, which, whether it be expressly found in the words of scripture, or not, is at least supposed to be *implied*, and *alluded* to in them. Thus the Trinitarians think it absolutely necessary that "the infinite evil of sin be atoned for by the sufferings of an infinite Being;" and though they find no such maxim in the scriptures (but in fact the contrary, as in all such passages as those in which God is said to forgive sins for *his own sake*, *his name's sake*, or *his mercy's sake*) yet they cannot but think that Christ must necessarily be God, having something to do that God only could execute.

Others

Others are struck with the idea of "the same person being the maker of the world, the medium of all the divine communications with it, and finally the redeemer of it." They cannot therefore be satisfied without supposing Christ to be possessed of powers equal to the making of the world, and consequently to have been of a superangelic nature. Dr. Clarke even scrupled to call him a *creature*, but considered him as a kind of necessary appendage to the almighty Father, as the hand by which he operated.

Nothing of this, however, is found in the scriptures; and whenever mention is made of *the creation of the heavens or the earth*, it is always ascribed to the Father only, who *stretched out the heavens by himself*, without any assistant, or instrument whatever; but still the idea is so splendid, and captivating, that the imagination cannot quit it. You however, compelled by the evidence of scripture (which represents the Father as not having spoken to mankind *by his son* till the *last days*) content yourself with making Christ equal to the creation of the earth and its appendages, and fancy (for you must excuse me, if, since it is not contained in the scriptures, I say you only fancy) that some mischief had been done to this world by an angelic being, which could only be repaired by a being of a superangelic nature, though the mischief be undefinable, and the manner in which the remedy (*viz.* the death of Christ) operated be equally

equally undefinable, which certainly throws an obscurity over the scheme.

Lastly, Others being staggered at the idea of Christ having made the heavens and the earth (a province which he never claimed himself, and which is never expressly ascribed to him) are satisfied with giving him *simple pre-existence*, without determining his rank in the scale of being at all, or knowing when his being commenced. This I consider as the poorest of all schemes, and least worth contending for, as you also seem to think by not adopting it.

All this while the simple doctrine of Christ being *a man*, though he is always so called in scripture, and he is always represented as having *felt* and *acted*, in all respects, like a man, assisted by God, is wholly overlooked, because there is nothing in it to strike the *imagination*. They see no grandeur or beauty, in the scheme to make it desirable to them; and yet in the writings of the apostle Paul we find a general maxim which applies to no other scheme whatever, viz. that *as by man comes death, so by man comes also the resurrection of the dead*. Thus, in my opinion, many, overlooking the plain sense of scripture, teach for doctrines the vain imaginations of men.

You no doubt see *my* opinion in some such unfavourable light; and nothing remains but that,
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with mutual candour, we exhibit our respective opinions with their proper evidence; being all of us persuaded, that the time is coming, when the whole christian world will embrace our opinion, and that in due time, all those who now think differently from us, will come to think just as we do, and wonder that they should ever have thought otherwise.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R VII.

Of the Mosaic History of the Fall of Man, and the Conclusion.

DEAR FRIEND,

YOU enlarge very much, in this *Appendix*, on the opinion I have advanced concerning the Mosaic history of the fall of man, and you had represented it (though it seems without knowing it to be mine) as “unworthy of particular notice;” and yet when you come to state your own opinion on the subject, I cannot perceive any ground for such an opprobrious distinction between them. I consider the account that Moses has given as *his*

F own,

own, since he no where says that it is not, and consequently the best that he could collect from tradition; and having particularly examined it, I scrupled not to call it *a very lame one*. I wish, however, that instead of the term *lame*, I had said *imperfect*, which has the same meaning, and might have given less offence. Now, what do you say of it? "I am inclined, p. 376, to look upon the " Mosaic history of the creation, the fall, the deluge, &c. as a popular history, which should be " read with great allowances, for the antient manner of instruction by emblems and hieroglyphics. " But I pay more regard to it than Dr. Priestley " seems to do." That no doubt you do. But then I see no *reason* for this superior regard. If it be after all but a *popular history*, and of course not strictly and philosophically true, and if the interpretation be so very difficult, what can we certainly learn from it? Interpret this as you do the passages that speak of the creation of all things by Christ in the New Testament, and see what it will then make for Arianism.

You say, on this occasion, p. 376, that I do not "allow of scriptural authority." But indeed, my friend, you should have expressed yourself with more caution. No man can pay a higher regard to *proper* scriptural authority than I do; but neither I, nor I presume yourself, believe implicitly every thing that is advanced by any writer in the Old or New Testament. I believe all the writers, without exception to have been men of the greatest probity,

probity, and to have been well informed of every thing of consequence of which they treat; but at the same time I believe them to have been *men*, and consequently fallible, and liable to mistake with respect to things to which they had not given much attention, or concerning which they had not the means of exact information; which I take to be the case with respect to the account that Moses has given of the creation and the fall of man.

It is on this principle only, that the evidence of revelation can be defended; and if we go upon any other, we load ourselves with insurmountable difficulties, as you would have been still more sensible of, if you had written as much as I have done in defence of revealed religion. Do not then say, in such general and unqualified language, that I do not allow of *scripture authority*. For if that was the case, I could not be a believer in revelation, which I am confident is not your opinion, or an opinion that you would be the means of propagating among others, who, on your authority, would be ready enough to adopt it, and propagate it still farther.

I do not, in this letter, discuss the subject of the fall of man, because I have already advanced what I think sufficient about it, and what I have as yet seen no reason to retract, in the *Theological Repository* under the signature of PAMPHILUS. For the same reason neither do I now say any thing in de-

fence of what I there advanced on the natural fallibility and peccability of Christ. But I ~~am~~ ^{wish} that, instead of seeing my opinions merely exhibited, with every circumstance that can tend to make them appear frightful, and excite the horror of the generality of readers (which is all that has yet been done by any of my opponents) they would *produce their strong reasons* against them. They can hardly suppose that such conduct will much affect *me*, and its effect on our readers is only temporary, and may be unfavourable to their purpose in the end. When the most frightful objects have been viewed very often they cease to appear frightful, and it is no uncommon thing for men to become the most attached to those things to which they at first had the greatest aversion.

As to the doctrine concerning *the person of Christ*, you and I do not differ so much, but that we agree in this, that, at the last day, the inquiry will not be *what we thought of him*, but whether we have *obeyed his commands*, and especially that great command, of loving his brethren, and consequently of shewing all possible candour to them. *Looking for, and hasting unto, that great day*; I am,

With the affection of a brother,

Dear Friend,

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

BIRMINGHAM,

NOVEMBER, 1787.

L E T T E R S

TO THE

CANDIDATES FOR ORDERS

IN THE

Two Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

TO THE

CAMBRIDGE COLLEGE



THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

The University of Oxford and Cambridge
has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of
the sum of £1000.00.00
from the
Honorable the
Baronet
Sir John
Cave
Bart.
and to certify that the same
has been duly received
and applied to the
use of the
University of
Oxford and
Cambridge
in the year
1849.

TO THE
CANDIDATES FOR ORDERS, &c.

L E T T E R I.

Of Mr. Howes's uncandid Insinuations.

GENTLEMEN,

I Am happy to find that, in consequence of the *Address* which I took the liberty to make to you, on the subject of *subscription to articles of faith*, and of the present controversy relating to *the person of Christ*, others have likewise addressed themselves to you; and as I do not wish to have fairer umpires in the case, it is with peculiar satisfaction that I once more solicit your attention, and before your tribunal make my defence, in answer to several charges advanced against me by different persons, and especially by Mr. Howes, a learned member of your church. These charges affect my late theological writings in general, my moral character, and the merits of the question in debate.

According to Mr. Howes (*Appendix to his fourth volume*, p. 7.) my *Histories of the Corruptions of Christianity*, and of *early opinions concerning Jesus Christ*, with the tracts I have written in defence of them, are “a huge mass of historical, critical, metaphysical, and theological romance,” and not of an instructive or entertaining kind, as romances might be. Speaking of Epiphanius, whose authority, you know, is not the highest among the christian Fathers, he says, p. 41. “If I found a hundredth part of the mistakes, inaccuracies, and romances in the history of Epiphanius, as in Dr. Priestley’s own histories, I should readily give him up as an incompetent witness.”

Alluding to my small pretensions to philosophy, he says, p. 23. “While ostensibly they pretend to act upon philosophical principles, they in reality only display a different mode of exerting a blind and impetuous sectarian zeal, and daily commit the same ravages with their pens upon the venerable remains of christian antiquity, which their predecessors, the Mahometan Unitarians, did with fire and sword, by destroying or mangling all the authentic memorials of the christian religion in antient ages; and this in order to favour pretended high antiquity of their own Unitarian sect, of the existence of which I can in fact find no evidence before the age of Socinus in 1500 after Christ, but at least not in the two first centuries,”

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As to my pretension of having *truth* for the object of my inquiries, Mr. Howes absolutely ridicules it, as you will find in the following exordium to his last work, which is so eloquent, that I cannot forbear giving it intire. "The spirit of disputation," p. 1. "is like a magic glass, which inverts the whole creation; that is no longer light which we see, nor that real substance which we feel; it teaches us to doubt even our own existence; all the attainments of human science, all the ancient traditions of religion, all the memorials of written history, all the slow and accumulated knowledge of past ages, are made to disappear like a vision, are displaced, distorted, and annihilated, whenever they stand in the way of a new and favourite hypothesis; which has been hastily perhaps taken up at first by a false spirit of philosophy, nursed by the subtle spirit of metaphysics, and defended by a wrangling spirit of disputation; all of these sufficient enemies to truth to be both able and willing to disfigure every feature of it, and this also in the very moment when the most flattering promises are made of an inviolable attachment to truth and truth only.

"Few," he says, p. 15, "too few perhaps, may be inclined along with myself to search for truth with caution and candour, or to embrace it when discovered. Therefore it has been for the few alone that my observations have been culled. From those who bring religious or disputatious prejudices along with them I can expect

“ expect no good; if while they ostensibly profess
 “ the cause of truth only, they bring with them a
 “ lurking envy at the emoluments of the established
 “ church; and though called by Elijah to follow
 “ him to heaven, if they have their thoughts still
 “ fixed upon earth, upon unyoking the oxen, and
 “ partaking of the tythes, &c. all such, before
 “ they approach the hallowed ground of *truth*, must
 “ first *put off the old man that is corrupt, according*
 “ *to deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of a*
 “ right understanding, both *to will and to do ac-*
 “ *cording to the good motions of reason.*” These
 general sentiments of Mr. Howes are, no doubt,
 very just, though oddly enough expressed. The
 question is, whether a beam in his own eye does
 not prevent his seeing a mote in that of another.

So far am I, according to Mr. Howes, from
 being a searcher after truth, or loving the *light*,
 that I rejoice in *darkness*, and wish to be covered
 with it. Speaking of my representation of the sense
 of Epiphanius, he says, p. 122, “ Such a conduct
 “ tends only to introduce confusion. This, how-
 “ ever, may be more acceptable than perspicuity,
 “ to those whose best evidence for their assertions is,
 “ *let the darkness cover us.*” On this occasion I
 shall only seriously say, that if this account of my
 views be true, if I do wish that darkness may cover
 me, the dreadful imprecation will be fulfilled.
 Though Mr. Howes has taken much pains to re-
 present me as an unbeliever in christianity, and a
 secret enemy to it, I am, gentlemen, a serious
 believer in it; and I hope that both my writings
 and

and my conduct will shew, to the unprejudiced, that I truly respect it, and that I shall never violate the spirit and precepts of it so much as Mr. Howes has done in this most unchristian insinuation.

Besides charging me with a total disregard to truth, Mr. Howes more than insinuates that my principal motive in writing is to get possession of the tythes, and other emoluments, of the established church. My most serious enquiries, he says, p. 3, "are often interlarded with warm ejaculations, which betray a longing wish after tythes, &c. Is this consistent in those who profess only a regard for truth." Quoting some expressions of mine he says, p. 12, "such language may be suitable to the party zeal of a sectary, who makes it his business to fight against establishments unless he can partake of them, as I have shewn from his own words Dr. Priestley wishes to do. But this is not consistent with my own views or practice."

Now, gentlemen, if any credit be due to my uniform professions, or to my conduct, I wish, and shall do my endeavour towards effecting, the utter downfall of *all* ecclesiastical establishments, together with their tythes, and every thing else belonging to them. Other writers upbraid me with my violence on this subject. Besides, if I really were what Mr. Howes represents me to be, no believer in christianity, and destitute of all regard to truth, why might not one establishment suit my purpose

as

as well as another? and why have I applied no part of that *address*, and *affiduity*, which are generally ascribed to me, to get some preferment in the church? Considering my connexions, few persons will doubt but that, if this had been my object, I might have made a better provision for myself in the church, than I am likely to make out of it.

But how is it that Mr. Howes *proves* that my intention is to get possession of the tythes, &c. *from my own words*. It is as follows: Having expressed my wish, as I frequently have done, for the utter abolishing of all establishments, I mentioned, in my late *Discourse on free Inquiry*, a more equitable mode of establishing christianity, which might be adopted in preference to the present; saying "the
 " most equitable thing would be to allow Uni-
 " tarians the use of a church, when their proportion
 " of the tythes, &c. would be sufficient for the
 " maintenance of a minister of their own persua-
 " sion." Again, in my Sermon preached at Leeds, I say, "all who are interested in the support of
 " these anti-christian establishments, which usurp
 " an undue authority over the consciences of men,
 " and whose wealth and power are advanced by
 " them, are in a state of consternation, &c."

"By a comparison of the above two passages," Mr. Howes says, Note, p. 3, "it appears that Dr. Priestley would not consider establishments as
 " anti-christian, in case the power and wealth of
 " the Unitarians were advanced by them, and that
 " such

"such an establishment would not be to usurp an
 "undue authority over the consciences of men.
 "For what authority has an orthodox establishment
 "at present over the consciences of men, except
 "the influence arising from what he elsewhere calls
 "the present exclusive advantages of establish-
 "ments?"

If you, gentlemen, can see the force of this rea-
 soning, you are better skilled in the art of logic than
 I pretend to be. The fair construction of the pas-
 sages, without any help from my most unequivocal
 language elsewhere, is that *all* ecclesiastical esta-
 blishments are *anti-christian*, that all of them usurp
 an undue authority over the consciences of men; and
 that, instead of wishing to partake of their emolu-
 ments, I shall rejoice in their downfall; but that
 if they cannot be taken down altogether, it might
 be better to fix them on a broader basis, so that
 they might comprehend all the serious professors
 of christianity, Unitarians as well as others, which
 is actually the case in North-America. Mr. Howes,
 by his imprudence and intemperate zeal, is, unknown
 to himself, contributing more to the discredit, and
 consequently to the downfall, of the church esta-
 blishment of this country, than I am doing; and
 if abler and better advised men do not interfere, and
 better measures be not adopted, the ruin of it will
 be accomplished much sooner than I had ventured
 to expect. But I am not so violent a reformer as
 to wish to imitate the members of the church of
 England, when they made the *act of uniformity*;
 in

in consequence of which two thousand conscientious ministers were deprived of their livings, and many exchanged them for prisons. I would not deprive any man of his present emolument, but would secure it to him for his life, even that which Dr. Horsley has gained for his important services in writing against myself.

Having descanted upon my *Dedication*, Mr. Howes condescends to bestow some reflections on my *title page*, ridiculing my "professing myself a *philosopher*, as my title page," he says, p. 13, "sets forth in full shew, although indeed little will be found within corresponding to real philosophy, except hard words." Then, in his Note, he recites those additions to my name, which you will find in the title page of these *Letters*, in the use of which, as it is the universal practise, I was not aware of there being any thing reprehensible. Not one of the foreign titles was directly, or indirectly, solicited by myself. For a considerable time I declined the use of them, though contrary to universal custom. I then prefixed them to my philosophical writings only; but being informed that as my other writings went abroad, it would be considered as an affront to the societies which, justly or unjustly, had bestowed them, if they were omitted, I have very lately begun to prefix them to most, but not to all my publications.

Had not Mr. Howes so expressly disclaimed all the *arts of controversy*, and asserted that all his observations

servations were on *books*, and not on *authors*, it might have been thought that some of the remarks I have animadverted upon were of the latter class. For my own part, I profess to be a controversial writer, because I consider fair controversy as a valuable means of discovering and ascertaining truth; but I should think myself disgraced by so much of the *art* of it as you must see have been adopted by Mr. Howes, even in what is quoted in this introductory letter, which I conclude by subscribing myself,

Gentlemen,

Your very humble Servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

L E T T E R II.

Of the Doctrine of the Ebionites.

GENTLEMEN,

HAVING given you some idea of the *temper* with which Mr. Howes engages in this *controversy* (though on his side it must by no means be so denominated) and of the opinion which he entertains of myself, and of my writings, and also
of

of himself and his writings, I now proceed to the question in debate.

The position which I have endeavoured to establish in my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*, is that the primitive church was properly *Unitarian*, that the great mass of common unlearned christians continued to be so till near the council of Nice, and that it was a considerable time before Unitarianism was considered as *heretical*. I have also endeavoured to shew at large, that the doctrine of the Trinity had its origin in Platonism. Both these positions Mr. Howes denies. He even denies the existence of any such doctrine as that of *Unitarianism* (which he quaintly calls *humanism*) in the two first centuries, and is inclined to do it even till the time of Socinus, or about the year 1500. He denies it both with respect to the *orthodox*, and the *heretics*. "Dr. Priestley," he says, p. 8, "has not, and cannot fix upon any one christian sect of the first ages (as I defy him to do) whom he can prove to have disbelieved in the divinity of Christ." In the title page of his work, he says, "no such christians ever existed except in Utopia, during the two first centuries, as those whom Dr. Priestley calls ancient Unitarians, that is, who were not believers in the divinity of Christ, in some mode or other."

In attempting to answer such an extravagant assertion as this, I feel as I should do if I were required to prove that there were any such people

as

as the ancient *Britons*, and that the *Saxons* were intruders in this country. For to deny them is equally to abandon all faith in history. Mr. Howes, indeed acknowledges that he is nearly at least *singular* in his opinion. "It is a subject," he says, p. 8, "which has never been sufficiently attended to by former writers, who have too readily conceded, or rather acquiesced without enquiry, in the confident assertions of the Unitarians, that there *did* exist, in the two first christian ages, some sects who disbelieved the divinity of Christ." If therefore I be in an error, it seems that I am not, like Mr. Howes, singular, or nearly singular, in it. I err in good company, and in that of the orthodox as well as that of the heterodox; and if I have adopted a mistake, I have not the guilt of being the first to start it.

As Mr. Howes cannot deny but that ancient sects of christians are said by the earliest writers to have called Christ a *mere man*, he says, p. 36, "All the evidence produced by Dr. Priestley that the Ebionites believed Christ to be a mere man, is only by some brief and summary expressions, found in several of the Fathers, when they were reasoning on some other subjects, wherein they had no intention of explaining the whole of the Ebionitish creed, but introduced incidentally only so much of it as made for their own reasoning in those particular passages." We shall soon see how this hypothesis accords with the facts.

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I have clearly shewn that, by the confession of all the christian Fathers, who were certainly interested to deny the fact if they could, neither Christ himself, nor any of the apostles before John, taught his pre-existence or divinity with clearness, and that the chief reason which they assigned for it was, that the prejudices of the Jews, in favour of their Messiah being a mere man, were so strong, that their minds would have revolted at it. The christian world in general, therefore, not having been *instructed* in these doctrines, could not have *believed* them till after the time in which John published his gospel, which was generally supposed to be after the death of the other apostles, and the destruction of Jerusalem. But before this time christianity, in its Unitarian state, was received in almost every part of the Roman empire.

However, great changes in opinion are never brought about suddenly, or without circumstances which prove their reality; and since we cannot find the least trace of any change having been produced in the christian world by the writings of John, we are necessarily led to infer, that the notion of John having taught the doctrines of the pre-existence and the divinity of Christ is an improbable hypothesis, though the best that could be thought of to account for a fact, the reality of which the christian Fathers could not deny, viz. the existence of Unitarianism in the great mass of the common people in their own times, and those immediately preceding them.

I have

I have shewn that all the Jewish christians were called *Ebionites* or *Nazarenes*, and that, according to the unanimous testimony of the ancients, they did not believe in the pre-existence, or the divinity of Christ, though some of them believed in his miraculous conception. It is pretended that besides the Ebionites and Nazarenes, who are acknowledged to have been unbelievers in the divinity of Christ, there were other Jewish christians who believed that doctrine. But I find no trace of any such persons. Since Mr. Howes, however, denies that even the Ebionites or Nazarenes disbelieved that doctrine, it may be useful to produce sufficient authority for the common opinion, in reply to him; and not to trouble you with unnecessary quotations from original writers, in doing this I shall, in most cases, content myself with referring you to my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*, in which you will find the passages at full length.

The first christian writer who mentions the Ebionites by that name is Irenæus; and nothing can be more evident than that, contrary to what Mr. Howes asserts, his *argument* shews that he could not have considered them as believing the divinity of Christ. "God will judge them," he says, vol. iii. p. 279, "and how can they be saved, if it be not God that works out their salvation upon earth." Again he says, p. 280, "if they persist in their error, not receiving the word of incorruption, they continue in mortal
G 2 "flesh,

“flesh, and are subject to death, not receiving
“the antidote of life.”

I appeal to you, gentlemen, whether this writer could have argued in this manner, or have expressed himself so harshly, if he had considered the Ebionites as believing the divinity of Christ. This testimony of Irenæus is alone abundantly sufficient to prove that, in his opinion, the Ebionites were no believers in the divinity of Christ.

Tertullian, whom you will find Mr. Howes quotes as holding a different opinion, says, vol. iii. p. 204, that “Ebion did not believe that Christ “was the Son of God,” probably meaning that he thought him to be *the Son of Joseph*. But no person I apprehend ever disbelieved the miraculous conception, and at the same admitted the divinity of Christ, whether the connexion between these opinions be necessary or not.

The testimony of Origen is particularly express. He says, vol. ii. p. 166, “those of the “Jews who believed Jesus to be Christ are called “Ebionites. Of these,” he says, “some thought “him to be the son of Joseph and Mary, and “others of Mary only and the Holy Spirit, but “did not believe his divinity.”

This is so contrary to Mr. Howes’s assertion, that he thought it necessary to make an observation
upon

upon it. "If Origen's words," he says, p. 83, "be attended to, it seems evident that he never meant to apply the appellation of Ebionites to the Jewish christians in general, in any other than in a loose sense, just as the members of the church of England are called Calvinists; meaning only as to their general principles, and not that they are lineally descended from the original Calvinists in Switzerland." But certainly they would not be called Calvinists at all, if they were not supposed to hold the distinguishing principles of Calvinism. So neither would Origen have asserted of the Ebionites in general, that they disbelieved the divinity of Christ, and that all the Jewish believers were called Ebionites, if it had not been his opinion that the Jewish christians in general, and even those before his own time, held the opinion which he ascribes to them. The probability will always be, that bodies of men receive their doctrines from their ancestors.

Eusebius almost copies Origen in his account of the two sorts of Ebionites, saying, vol. iii. p. 168, "they think Christ to be merely a man, like other men;" and of those who believe the miraculous conception he expressly says, "they by no means allowed that Christ was God, the word, and wisdom,"

Epiphanius, whose authority Mr. Howes pretends to be in his favour says, vol. iii. p. 209,

“Ebion himself believed that Christ was a mere
“man, born as other men are.”

With respect to the Nazarenes, whom I have proved to be the very same with the Ebionites, Theodoret says, vol. iii. p. 183, “they are Jews, “who own Christ as a righteous man,” which he would never have contented himself with saying, if he had supposed that they believed in his divinity.

Epiphanius could never have considered the Nazarenes as believers in the divinity of Christ, when he represented them, vol. iii. p. 185, as “people who, on hearing the name of Jesus “only, and the miracles performed by the apostles, “believed on him.” It is evident that he considered them as not having heard of his *divinity*, and he speaks of doth the Ebionites and Nazarenes, p. 140, as requiring to be taught the divinity of Christ by John.

I have no occasion to pursue this evidence any farther, as all the later writers, without exception, agree with those that I have already quoted. I shall therefore close my present letter, and in my next consider what Mr. Howes has advanced to invalidate this evidence.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R III.

Of the true Meaning of a Passage in Tertullian, and another in Epiphanius quoted by Mr. Howes.

GENTLEMEN,

THE passages on which Mr. Howes lays the the greatest stress are one or two in Epiphanius, who, as I have observed, ascribes to some of the Ebionites a tenet of the Gnostics, viz. that *the Christ* was a super-angelic created being, who descended into Jesus at his baptism, in which I doubt not he ascribes to them the opinion of the Cerinthians; and this is not much to be wondered at, as the Cerinthians were Jewish christians, as well as the Ebionites. The passages may be seen in my *History*, vol. iii, p. 206. But in them he speaks of this Christ of the Ebionites as *created*, and what *divinity* can that be? Mr. Howes, indeed, strangely talks of *degrees of divinity*. But this is to me as incomprehensible as the doctrine of the Trinity. "In regard to the degree of divinity," Mr. Howes says, p. 107, "whether the Christ of the Ebionites was a superior, or only a subordinate divinity, or no divinity at all, but merely a super-human spirit, this is a question of debate between the orthodox and the Arians, and not between the orthodox and

“the humanists.” I think, however, that, if Mr. Howes maintains that the Christ of the Ebionites was *God*, and I maintain that he was *not*, the question is *between him and me*, if there be any question between us at all. If this Christ had no divinity at all, surely I am justified in saying that the Ebionites did not believe the divinity of Christ in any sense of the word, and Mr. Howes can have no reason for contesting what I advance.

Mr. Howes imagines that he has found two authorities to support the opinion which he had ascribed to Epiphanius. The first is from Tertullian, whom I shall quote more at length than Mr. Howes has done, and shew that he has grossly misapprehended his meaning. The passage is in his treatise *De Carne Christi*, sec. xiv. in which, having spoken of Christ as being *made lower than the angels*, he says, that “it was as *man*, having
 “the flesh and the soul of man. But as the
 “spirit of God, and the power of the Most
 “High, he could not be lower than the angels,
 “being God, and the son of God. As much,
 “therefore, as, when he carried the man, he was
 “less than the angels, by so much when he carried the angel, he was not less than they. This
 “opinion may agree with that of Ebion, who
 “supposed Jesus to be a mere man, only of the
 “seed of David, that is, not the son of God;
 “clearly however in some respects more glorious
 “than

"than the prophets, so that an angel may be said
 "to have been *in him*, as in Zachariah, though it
 "is never expressly said so concerning Christ*.

"From this passage," Mr. Howes says, p. 33,
 "it is plain that the Ebionites did not look upon
 "Jesus himself as the Christ, or chief agent; but
 "only as the receptacle of a superior agent; and
 "whether this angel be considered as partaking
 "in any degree of a divine nature, or not, yet
 "this makes no difference of any moment. It
 "was still not Jesus, a mere man, who was, ac-
 "cording to them, *the Christ*, but some superior
 "being, of an intermediate nature between divi-
 "nity and humanity."

Now, certainly, what Mr. Howes calls a dif-
 ference of no moment, viz. whether this Christ
 was God, or not, is, as I have observed, the only
 difference between him and me. But he totally
 misconstrues the passage, the meaning of which is
 as follows. Tertullian describes the doctrine of
 the Ebionites, by saying that they believed Jesus

* Minuisti eum modicum quid citra angelos, quomodo vide-
 bitur angelum induisse, sic infra angelos diminutus, dum
 homo sit, qua caro et anima et filius hominis? Qua autem
 spiritus Dei et virtus altissimi non potest infra angelos haberi.
 Deus scilicet et Dei filius. Quanto ergo dum hominem gestat
 minor angelis factus est, tanto non dum angelum gestat. Po-
 terit hæc opinio Hebioni convenire, qui nudum hominem, et
 tantum ex semine David, id est non et Dei filium constituit
 Jesum. Plane angelis aliquo gloriosiore ut ita in illo angelus
 fuisse dicatur quemadmodum in aliquo Zecharia.

to be a mere man; but to give him some advantage over other prophets, they said, that an angel spake *in him* (not *to him*). This is all that according to Tertullian, they acknowledged. But they did not say that this angel was any part of Christ, or united to him, but a very different being. Tertullian indeed says how far, *in his own opinion*, their doctrine might be reconciled with that of the orthodox, as the divine principle in Jesus might be called an *angel*. But this is intirely his own construction, and a very harsh one, by which he misrepresents the tenets of the orthodox themselves; according to which the divine principle in Christ was no *angel*, but the uncreated *logos* of the Father, that principle which created all angels. Such is this boasted authority for the concurrence of Tertullian with Epiphanius, in maintaining that the Ebionites were believers in the divinity of Christ; when both of them, in other passages, clearly assert the very contrary.

In this very passage Tertullian mentions his own opinion as that of *Christ being God*, and *the Son of God*, i. e. as possessed of divinity, and that of the Ebionites as of his *not being the Son of God*, that is, as the son of Joseph, and having no divinity. Besides, he represents the opinion of the Ebionites, as that of there being only such a difference between Christ and the other prophets, as between Zachariah and the other prophets, in consequence of an angel speaking *in him*, and not *to him*. But will Mr. Howes himself say, that it was their opinion, that

that Zachariah, in consequence of an angel speaking *in him*, and not *to him*, was himself an angel, or a God?

But Mr. Howes pretends to have the authority of Theodoret, as well as that of Tertullian in support of that of Epiphanius. But even here his argument is more extraordinary than that from Tertullian. You will naturally imagine, that if Theodoret had really been of opinion, that the Ebionites were believers in the divinity of Christ, he would have advanced it in that section of his history which is appropriated to the opinions of the Ebionites. I shall therefore recite the whole of that section.

Having, in the first book of his *Heretical Fables*, given an account of the *Gnostics*, who held the doctrine of *two principles*, he proceeds in his second book, to give an account of those who, he says, held a *directly opposite doctrine*. "The first of "this phalanx" he says, "was Ebion, which in "the Hebrew language signifies *Poor*. He said, "as we do, that there is one uncaused being, and "that he is the maker of the world, but that our "Lord Jesus Christ was born of Joseph and "Mary, being a man, but excelling in virtue and "purity all other men, and living according to "the law of Moses. They use no other gospel "than that according to the Hebrews, and call "the apostle," meaning Paul, "an apostate. Of "these was Symmachus, who translated the Scriptures of the Old Testament from Hebrew into
"Greek.

“ Greek. There is, however, another division of
 “ them besides this, having the same denomina-
 “ tion (for they also are called Ebionites) and in
 “ every thing else agree with the former, but say
 “ that our Saviour and Lord was born of a virgin.
 “ They use no other gospel than that according to
 “ Matthew; they keep their sabbath as the Jews
 “ do, but they also observe the Lord’s day as we
 “ do*.”

This is the whole of the section of Theodoret concerning the *Ebionites*, and do you perceive in it, Gentlemen, any trace of his supposing that the Ebionites were believers in the divinity of Christ? On the contrary, is it not evident that he represents them as believing his mere humanity. I really think that if Mr. Howes himself had seen this article (which it appears from p. 46, he had not) he would never have claimed the authority of Theo-

* Ταῦταισι δὲ τῆς φαλαγγὸς ἤρξεν Ἐβίων, τὸν πῶλον δὲ ἔως Ἑβραῖοι προσαγορευουσιν. Οὐδὲ ἓνα μὲν ἀγεννητὸν εἶπεν, παραπλησίως ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸν εἰδείξεν εἶναι τῶ κοσμῷ δημιουργόν, τὸν δὲ κύριον Ἰησοῦν χριστὸν ἐξ Ἰωσήφ καὶ τῆς Μαρίας εἶπεν γεγεννησθαι, ἀνθρώπον μὲν οὐκ, ἀρετὴ δὲ καὶ καθαρότητι τῶν ἄλλων διαφερόντα, καὶ αὐτὸν Μωσαϊκὸν πολιτευόμενον. Μόνον δὲ τὸ κατὰ Ἑβραίους εὐαγγέλιον δεχόμεναι, τοῦ δὲ ἀποστόλου ἀποσταίην καλεῖται. Ἐκ τῶν Συμμάχων, ὁ τὴν παλαιὰν γραφὴν ἐκ τῆς Ἑβραίων μετὰδεῖκας εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα φωνῇ. Ἀλλὰ δὲ παρὰ ταύτην συμμορία τὴν αὐτὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἐχούσα, Ἐβιωνεὶς γὰρ καὶ οἱ προσαγορευόμεναι, τὰ ἅλλα δὲ ἀπαντὰ συννομολογεῖ τοῖς πρῶτοις, τὸν δὲ σῶτῆρα καὶ κύριον ἐκ παρθεὸς γεγεννησθαι φησὶν. Εὐαγγελίῳ δὲ τῷ κατὰ Ματθαῖον κεχρημένοι μόνω, καὶ τὸ μὲν σαββαίον κατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαίων τιμωσιν νόμον, τὴν δὲ κυριακὴν καθιερούσι, παραπλησίως ἡμῖν.

doret,

doret. How then does he pretend to it? Not directly, but very indirectly indeed.

“Epiphanius,” he says, p. 45, “in his brief summary concerning the Elcesaites, says they held nearly the same opinion in all things with the Ebionites,”—now that the Elcesaites believed “in the descent of a divine Christ, and his union with the humanity of Jesus, is proved by all writers, but particularly by Theodoret, who says they believe that there is one unbegotten being, and him they call the maker of all things; yet they do not say that Christ was one, but that there was one above, and another below, and that he had formerly dwelt in many persons, but that at last he descended. Jesus also, as Elxai says sometimes, was *ex deo*; but at other times he calls him a spirit, and sometimes says that a virgin was his mother; in other writings however, not even this. Again, he says, that he passeth into other bodies, and that at every time he appeared differently.”

Thus because such a writer as Epiphanius says that the Ebionites agreed *nearly in all things* with the Elcesaites, and according to Theodoret *these* believed the descent of a *created spirit* called Christ, into Jesus, the Ebionites believed the *divinity* of Christ. Many things are wanting to make this a good syllogism. I shall not even take the trouble to point them out. That the Christ of the Elcesaites was not *god* is evident, from his supposed transmigrations.

Mr.

Mr. Howes supposes, p. 30, that both Epiphanius and Tertullian borrowed their account of the Ebionites from Justin Martyr's lost *treatise against Heretics*. But there is not the least probability in the conjecture. It is impossible to read the two remarkable passages in which Justin gives an account of *heresies* (see my *History*, vol. i. p. 270) without being satisfied that, in his idea, the Gnostics were the only heretics. Of the Unitarians he speaks with respect, and even apologizes to them for differing from them.

A circumstance of extreme improbability in Mr. Howes's scheme, sufficient of itself to explode it, is that all the difference between the Ebionites and the orthodox was the *time* in which the union between the divine and human nature in Christ took place; the orthodox saying it was at the conception of Jesus, and the Ebionites at his baptism. For he says nothing of any difference between them with respect to his strange notion of the *kind*, or *degree of divinity*. But can any person seriously believe that so small a difference as this could have been the occasion of so much animosity as the orthodox shewed towards the Ebionites? If the only difference had been the circumstance of *time*, this would have been principally insisted upon in their censures; as, if the point of difference had been the *degree of divinity*, the *degree* would have been insisted upon, and not *divinity*, or *no divinity*, which is always the case.

Mr. Howes thought it of some consequence to fix the *origin* of the Ebionites, whom I have supposed to be coeval with the apostles. On the contrary, Mr. Howes says, p. 58. "We find ~~no~~ certain proof of the existence of any Ebionites before 98. It is the time when the Fathers suppose John to have written his gospel, which determines the date of the rise both of the Ebionites and the Nazarenes, as sectaries."

To prove that the Ebionites were subsequent to Aquila and Theodotion, Mr. Howes quotes Irenæus, p. 56, who, after citing their interpretation of a Hebrew word, says, *quos secuti Ebionitæ, ex Josepho eum genitum dicunt.*

This argument is curious, as it is evident that all that Irenæus meant, was that the Ebionites agreed with Aquila and Theodotion (who were, in fact of their own body, and therefore could not be prior to them) in the interpretation of the word in question. According to Jerom (See vol. iii. p. 220) Theodotion was an Ebionite, and certainly not the first of the sect. So also was Symmachus, who was cotemporary with Justin Martyr. Besides Eusebius says, vol. iii. p. 163, that "the denomination of *Ebionites* was given by the first heralds of our Saviour," which certainly carries them to the age of the apostles.

The late date of John's gospel, which Mr. Howes says the christian Fathers supposed, is greatly

greatly favourable to my purpose. For they all represent him as the first who taught with clearness and effect, the doctrines of the pre-existence and divinity of Christ. For the *later* this was done, the longer time there had been for the doctrine of the simple humanity of Christ to establish itself.

What Mr. Howes has undertaken, in his last publication, is to prove that all the *ancient heretics* were believers in the divinity of Christ, reserving for a future opportunity, p. 126 (which I hope will come soon) to prove that all the orthodox (or those who, being in communion with the Catholic church, were *not deemed heretics*) believed it. But he has confined himself to the denominations of *Ebionites* and *Nazarenes*, who were Jews, omitting the *Gentile Unitarians*, of whom Justin Martyr speaks with great respect, though professing to take the liberty of thinking differently from them, as I have shewn at large in my *History*, vol. iii. p. 278, &c. Mr. Howes is equally silent with respect to the *Alogi* of Epiphanius, and who, he says (*Hær.* 51. sect. 12. *Opera*, vol. i. p. 423) were opposed by the apostle John; so that according to him they must have existed in the age of the apostles.

Thus, Gentlemen, I willingly make you the judges between Mr. Howes and me. Epiphanius himself, you see, only supposed the *Ebionites* to have asserted with the *Cerinthians* (in which

which it is almost certain that he was mistaken) that the Christ entered into Jesus at his baptism, but he acknowledges that they did not suppose that this descending Christ was *God*; and his farther evidence from Tertullian and Theodoret, in support of what would avail him nothing if he could prove it, is most palpably weak and insufficient.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R IV.

Of Mr. Howes's Charge of a wilful Anachronism, in the Age of Plotinus.

GENTLEMEN,

YOU have seen several specimens of Mr. Howes's bold charges, and his very lame support of them. I shall now present you with another even bolder than the preceding, and still worse supported.

With an air of insolent triumph he subjoins to the title page of his work (and he inserts the same in all his public advertisements of it)—“together
H “with

“with another curious specimen of romance, in
 “his late *History of Early Opinions concerning Christ*,
 “in regard to Plotinus being made by him to
 “instruct the first christian Fathers in the Plato-
 “nic catechism, a whole century before Plotinus
 “was born.”

This, Gentlemen, it gives me real concern to say, is nothing less than *an absolute falsehood*, both in words and sense. It is even destitute of all colour of truth. From reading what Mr. Howes so confidently asserts, you would unavoidably conclude that I had represented the christian Fathers as quoting Plotinus, or borrowing something that came from *him*, which however is by no means true. Mr. Howes quotes no passage in my *History* in proof of his assertion; but you may look it through; and I am confident you will find no such thing, nor any thing from which it can be inferred. As what Mr. Howes advances on this subject is not very long, I shall copy the whole of it from p. 127, &c.

“Dr. Priestley suggests in his *History of Christian opinions*, vol. i. in proof of the christian philosophers about the time of Justin having first expelled humanism, and introduced the doctrine of Christ’s divinity, that they had borrowed their notions of the Trinity from the *later* Platonists, as they are commonly called. Now Plotinus was the oldest of these later Platonists, and he was not born until after the year 200;
 “how

"how then could Justin, about the year 140, bor-
 "row any thing from the later Platonists. Yet
 "not satisfied with suggesting this monstrous ana-
 "chronism, both by his arrangement, and ex-
 "pressions in the body of his new history, in such
 "a manner as must necessarily lead his readers
 "into an error concerning the possibility of the
 "fact; Dr. Priestley has taken care moreover to
 "confirm them in this error in his *biographical*
 "*chart* prefixed to his first volume: for behold
 "there Plotinus is placed as being born soon
 "after the year 100, and a little before Justin
 "Martyr, so as to make him old enough to
 "teach the Platonic catechism to Justin; where-
 "as, in reality, Justin was long dead before
 "the birth of Plotinus, who did not flourish until
 "about the year 240; therefore a whole cen-
 "tury later than where Dr. Priestley has placed
 "him in his chart. What dependence then can
 "be placed on the expositions of scripture, or the
 "assertions in history, by those who can thus
 "make dead christians to be instructed by pro-
 "phane philosophers, who were not born until 20
 "or 30 years after the death of their pretended
 "scholars?"

Now, so far have I been from saying that Jus-
 tin Martyr, or any of the christian Fathers, quoted
 Plotinus, that I no where say that they adopted
 the principles of any of the *later Platonists*, but of
Platonism in general. Examine all my quotations,
 and you will find that they refer to Plato only. If

any thing that I have said should imply more, it is a casual oversight.

If I *bad* said that the christian Fathers adopted any principles of the *later Platonists*, as different from those of Plato himself, there would have been no anachronism in it. I should only have represented them as adopting the principles of the school, which principles I shew to have existed by means of the writings of the later Platonists. With the same colour of truth Mr. Howes might have said that I had made Justin Martyr the scholar of Jamblicus, Julian, or even Proclus, who lived in the year 600. For I quote them as much as I do Plotinus, and for the same purpose, viz. to ascertain what were the doctrines of their school.

If Mr. Howes meant to assert that Plotinus was the founder of the sect of later Platonists, which is the only sense in which his calling him the *oldest* can be to his purpose, it is notoriously false. He himself quotes Petavius, as saying that "Plotinus was the scholar of Ammonius," and in the same place he quotes without censure my saying that "those who are usually called the *later Platonists* were those philosophers, chiefly of Alexandria, who a little *before* and *after* the commencement of the christian æra, adopted the general principles of Plato." If then the school, and its tenets, existed before the *christian æra*, what anachronism is there in making the christian Fathers

thers borrow from it. Does not Philo appear to have imbibed the principles of this school, as much as any of the christian Fathers? Did they not therefore exist long before Plotinus?

Mr. Howes says I have suggested this monstrous anachronism "both by my arrangement, and my expressions, in the body of my history," which is absolutely false. For in the book itself, as you will see, vol. iv. p. 353, I give the age of Plotinus right, saying that he died in 270 aged 66; though, by some accident, perhaps the mistake of the engraver, the name is placed in the *Chart*, just a century wrong; which, if I were to explain to you the mechanical method of drawing such charts, I could satisfy you was the easiest of all mistakes. In my large *Chart of Biography*, which I could not mean to depart from, but really, thought I had copied, Plotinus is placed where he should be.

Thus, Gentlemen, can a man, who professes to disclaim all the *arts of controversy*, write. I could not have imagined that any person could have suspected another of *attempting* such an imposition as Mr. Howes charges me with putting on the public, an imposition, that a school boy might have detected and exposed, as well as Mr. Howes. I ought, however, to except Dr. Horsley who charged me with wilfully falsifying the common English translation of the New Testament. I should blush, and retire for ever from the sight or converse

of scholars, if I had been convicted of such a piece of miserable chicanery as this of Mr. Howes. These are the boasted champions of modern orthodoxy. Had any Unitarian endeavoured to take such an advantage of his opponent in controversy, I should have thought it necessary to disclaim all connexion with him. Let us see how Dr. Horne, and others, advocates for the doctrine of the Trinity, will act on this occasion. How different from this conduct of Mr. Howes is that of Dr. Geddes. If I should be obliged to surrender at discretion, it would be a pleasure to give my sword to so generous an adversary.

Two inconsiderable mistakes Mr. Howes has observed in my *History*, which I shall correct, and which I should have acknowledged with gratitude, if there had been any appearance of generosity or candour in the intimation. I had rendered *ἐδελυρον* *abominable rites*; whereas Mr. Howes, with great probability, conjectures, p. 73, that it means the *abomination* with which, according to Epiphanius, the Ebionites held other people. He also justly observes that I had no foundation for saying that the word *Ebion* (and not *Ebionite*) was not mentioned by Tertullian.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R V.

*Several gross Mistakes of Mr. Howes, with respect
to the Tenets of ancient Sects.*

GENTLEMEN,

MR. Howes, undertaking to correct my mistakes, should have been careful to make none of his own: and yet I will venture to say that, excepting, and hardly excepting, Dr. Horsley, there is no example of any person in modern times having made such gross blunders as he has done, in his account of the tenets of ancient sects; confounding the opinions of the Gnostics with those of the Ebionites, both of them with those of the Arians, and indeed all three with the orthodox, as all holding the divinity of Christ; though no schemes can be more clearly marked as distinct, by all who have treated of them. He might as well have confounded them all with Judaism, or Paganism itself.

Only read the following paragraphs, and then judge whether Mr. Howes or myself have travelled most in *Utopia*, or have dealt most in *romance*. After asserting, p. 33, that, according to Epiphanius, the opinion of the Ebionites was, that "it was not
" Jesus, a mere man, who was the Christ, but

H 4

" some

“some superior being, of a divine nature, or of
 “an intermediate nature between divinity and
 “humanity,” he adds, “this was also the chief
 “principle of the Arians, only with some vari-
 “ations in other respects. How then can Dr.
 “Priestley assert that the chief principle of Aria-
 “nism was not ancient among the christian sec-
 “taries. Arianism was, in fact, but a varied
 “copy of Gnosticism and Ebionitism. It bor-
 “rowed their chief principle of a created Christ,
 “and only accommodated it a little more to the
 “mode of orthodoxy, by supposing that the cre-
 “ated Christ, of an intermediate nature, to have
 “been united to humanity at the miraculous con-
 “ception of Mary, instead of a miraculous union
 “to the humanity of Jesus at baptism. Paulus
 “of Samosata varied this doctrine a little more
 “still, and only a little, by supposing, that the
 “divine Christ, instead of being created before
 “the creation, was first created by God, out of
 “his unmanifested logos, at the conception of
 “Mary; so that Paulus was in fact as much a
 “believer in the divinity of Christ as the Ebionites
 “and Arians.”

Let Mr. Howes produce any Arian, ancient or
 modern, who will say that he believes in the *divinity*
of Christ; and that this *divine Christ* should have
 been *created*, is a most palpable contradiction.
 He says that the Arians supposed their *created*
Christ, of an intermediate nature, to have been
 united to *humanity*. Now in *humanity* was always
 supposed

supposed to be included all that is *essential to man*, the *soul*, as well as the *body*. But no Arian ever held that Christ had a human soul. According to them the *created logos* occupied the place of one.

In my detail of the principles of the Gnostics and those of the Arians, you will find that, in one respect, they *did* resemble each other, though the latter were far from copying the former. Those Gnostics who held that Jesus had a real human body believed that he had also a human soul. For according to them, he was, in all respects, like another man till his baptism; but they said that a superangelic spirit, or *the Christ*, then came into him. The orthodox Fathers also asserted two intelligent principles in Christ, the human soul, and the uncreated logos; whereas the Arians, retaining the doctrine of the *logos* (not *the Christ* of the Gnostics) supposed it to have been *created*, not *uncreated*. But then they found it unnecessary to retain the human soul; it being justly deemed absurd that two created intelligent principles should be in one person.

What Mr. Howes here asserts of Paul of Samosata is, I will venture to assert, a strange and absurd fabrication of his own, for which, to adopt his own language, I *defy* him to produce any authority, ancient or modern. That Paul was as much a believer in the divinity of Christ as the Ebionites or Gnostics is certain, because none of them believed in it; but that the *divine Christ* was first
 “ created

“created by God out of his unmanifested logos,” is a notion that must have been utterly incomprehensible to this Paul, or to any man who endeavours to affix ideas to words.

Similar to this extravagance are the following curious assertions of Mr. Howes, p. 109. “The
“Ebionites were the mere spawn of the Cerin-
“thians, and the very dregs of absurdity and super-
“stition; just as the modern humanists are the
“humble imitators of the pretended philosophical
“Gnostics in general.”

What there is in common between the modern Unitarians and the Gnostics, Mr. Howes should have specified. According to him the Gnostics were believers in the divinity of Christ, whereas we disclaim that notion, in every sense of the word. It is the very cause of the great indignation against us that we do so. According to all antiquity, the Gnostics believed the pre-existence of Christ, and that he was of a nature superior to that of man, which it is known we disclaim. Mr. Howes himself will hardly say that we believe, with the Gnostics, that the world was not made by the supreme Being, but by a subordinate evil agent, or that this evil agent gave the law of Moses. In what then do we resemble them?

When I read these strange assertions of Mr. Howes, and his opinion, p. 117, that “the popular
“theology of the Jews is to be found in Philo,”
I fancy

I fancy myself to be in a new world of antiquity, and that some Pere Hardouin has recomposed all the christian Fathers, and all the other books relating to ecclesiastical history that I have ever read, or heard quoted before. When you read this, judge, gentlemen, whether the "new heavens and new earth for christian men" (of which Mr. Howes speaks, p. 2, as created by me) be found in my writings or in his.

Among Mr. Howes's other mistakes concerning the Arians, he does not, however, maintain with Dr. Horsley, that there is no difference between *their* doctrine; and the orthodox doctrine of the *personification of the logos*. He also admits the veracity of Origen; and so far from contending that there was a church of orthodox Jewish christians, at Jerusalem *after* the time of Adrian, he finds, p. 90, that there was but a very small one *before* that time.

By Mr. Howes's quoting the *Caraites*, p. 35, "because they cannot be supposed to be infected with the notions of more modern rabbinical Jews, but rather to tell us the true opinion of the original Jews," I am willing to hope that he does not *now* lay the stress that he did before on the writings of the *Cabbalists*, in proving that the Jews were always Trinitarians, and expected the second person of it in their Messiah, a notion which none of the christian Fathers could find among them; though they would, no doubt, have been as glad to catch at it as Dr. Allix, Mr. Howes, or Mr. Parkhurst.

Parkhurst. Mr. Howes, however, expresses his approbation, p. 112, of Mr. Parkhurst's late publication against me, in which he endeavours to prove the doctrine of the Trinity from the form of the word *elohim*. I can have no objection to Mr. Howes, Dr. Horsley, and Mr. Parkhurst continuing to admire one another, but they would do better for their cause, if they could agree a little more than they do, in the principles on which they defend it.

Mr. Madan also joins Mr. Parkhurst in urging the argument from *elohim*. But Dr. Croft, in his Bampton Lectures, disapproves of it. "Perhaps too much stress," he says, p. 64, "is laid upon the expression, *Let us make man in our image*. The plural is frequently applied to one only, and the language of consultation is evidently used in condescension to human infirmity. It may be dangerous," he adds, "to rest an article of faith upon that which may be a mere idiom."

I am, &c,

LETTER

L E T T E R VI.

*Of several Publications of less Note, and among them
Mr. Madan's.*

GENTLEMEN,

I Cannot pretend to notice every thing that has been addressed to me on the subject of this controversy. The tracts to which I have not particularly replied are of two characters, some being written in the way of *humour*, and the rest of *invective*, of the most virulent kind; whereas the only thing that is really wanting is serious *argument*. Excepting one of the publications of Mr. Whitaker*, who will find himself sufficiently answered in my *Letters to Dr. Geddes*, every thing I have seen of the argumentative kind relates to the doctrine of the *scriptures*; with respect to which so much has been advanced by myself and others, that I think it unnecessary to say any thing farther. In this we are, as it were, come to issue, and the public must determine between us. It is to the

* I would recommend to Mr. Whitaker the perusal of Mr. Wiche's *Observations on the debate now in agitation concerning the divine unity*, in a letter to himself, as containing many things deserving of his consideration, as well as that of all who give any attention to this controversy, and written with a truly christian spirit.

argument

argument from *antiquity* that I particularly wish to draw the attention of the learned ; and in this field very few have as yet made their appearance, and those few, as you must have perceived, have been very little acquainted with the ground they have ventured to tread.

Some of my opponents, evidently distrusting the power of *argument*, have more than hinted at the propriety of calling in the aid of the *civil magistrate* ; but none of them have done this so loudly, and so distinctly, as Mr. Madan, who says, Letters, p. 145, that “ the christian religion is a part of the common law of this country, that our kings are its nursing fathers, and our queens its nursing mothers ; that it has always been held that “ *blasphemy* and *prophaneness*, written, printed, or “ advisedly spoken, are indictable, and punishable ; and that punishments inflicted for these “ offences were never more deemed *persecution* “ than the convicting a person of profane cursing “ and swearing ; ” and my works, he says, “ might “ furnish matter for a trial at the next Stafford “ assizes ; ” but hints that it might not be proper to permit the trial to be printed, like that of Mr. Elwall.

I need not shew you, Gentlemen, that Mr. Madan’s maxims will justify all the persecutions that have been in the world, from the age of the apostles to the present time, as they were all in pursuance of the laws of the countries in which they

they were carried on. It is happy for the cause of free enquiry and truth, that the spirit of the present times only permits such monsters as these to shew their teeth and claws, and what they would do if they had the power. Mr. Madan should propose himself as a candidate for the next vacancy in the office of inquisition in Spain or Portugal, if his maxims would do even for those countries at present. Unhappily, he was born too late.

Much stress has been laid by several of my opponents, on my frank acknowledgment to Dr. Price, that "I did not know when my creed would be fixed." This, however, I must continue to say, while I continue my enquiries, and profess, as every fair enquirer will do, to be determined by any new and stronger evidence that shall be presented to me. And this is certainly no disadvantage to my readers, who, I hope, will not be moved by my *authority*, but only by the *evidence* that I lay before them; and *that* will always be the same, and have the same weight, though my idea of its weight should change ever so often.

Did not Luther go on changing his opinions till a very late period of his life, and was he ever reproached with it, except by the catholic party, whose spirit, I am sorry to say, is too apparent in the defenders of the church establishment of this country? But similar situations will dictate similar

lar modes of thinking and reasoning. Was it not highly honourable in Dr. Whitby, at a late period of a life devoted to study, and after having repeatedly defended the doctrine of the Trinity, to declare himself an Arian, and to defend that opinion in his *Last Thoughts*? Equally honourable was the change of opinion of the late excellent Bishop of Carlisle, who from being an Arian became a Socinian, and in the last edition of his *Considerations*, &c. carefully expunged every passage that had expressed his belief of the pre-existence of Christ. Let me class with such men as these, and not with those who are determined to hold their present opinions, whatever they be, at all events, and who shut their ears to all conviction; for such must be all those who censure my conduct.

Another of my opponents (but I am not now able to say which) ridiculing the Bishop of Landaff's truly useful publication for the use of young clergymen, amuses himself with the idea of the perplexity of a Welch curate, who should not be able to tell which scheme of faith, contained in that work, he should adopt; not considering, or perhaps not knowing, that the chief use of *reading* is to make men *think*, and form systems for themselves; and that every person officiating as a christian minister, whether residing in Wales or elsewhere, may reasonably be supposed to do this. Perhaps this acute reasoner would find a difference between treatises bound up

up together, uniformly printed, and published by the same person, and such as are published separately. Or perhaps, having his head full of the idea of subscription, he might think that nothing is to be *read* that is not also to be *subscribed*.

Several of my opponents, as well as Mr. Howes, have amused themselves, and their readers, with the letters, &c. I have lately subjoined to my name, in the title pages of some of my publications, under the idea, as I must suppose, of their reflecting some ridicule upon me, though they do not seem to have been able to make out their meaning. If this circumstance be any disgrace to me, it is my misfortune, and should entitle me to their compassion, as it was not of my seeking. None of them, however, reflect any dishonour on either of our English universities.

This business reminds me of what is told of Dr. South, who being reflected upon by Bishop Sherlock. on account of his *wit* (of which the bishop might think that he made an improper use) replied, that "it might have pleased God to have made his lordship a wit." Let my adversaries therefore spare me on this subject, since it might have happened, that their names should have had the same appendages with mine.

Some, as any thing is easier than close argumentation, have even amused themselves with
 I the

the number of my publications, and others with my *mottos*; and perhaps they may find some instruction as well as amusement in them.

I have been sometimes amused with what has been said of *myself*, and my *opinions*, of which some, who have addressed letters to me, seem to have been as ignorant as they have been of my titles. I need not observe that I have been most unmercifully stripped by them of every commendable quality of mind, natural or acquired, and of every kind of literature that is requisite to my writing on the subjects which I have presumed to discuss. But it is my *pride* (*rank pride, and baughtiness of soul*, as the poet calls it) on which they have enlarged the most. No man, I suppose, can presume to think for himself, and much less to teach others, but he must be *proud*.

"It is unquestionably pride," says one of them to you, "which has brought on your presumptuous teacher that *weakness*, that blindness and hardness of heart, the one as consequential of the other." To avoid this pride you can do no less than implicitly receive what your teachers think proper to prescribe to you; and perhaps, that humility *may have its perfect work*, it may be adviseable to sign the following form prescribed by a protestant synod in France, "I receive and approve, all that is contained in this confession of faith, and promise to persevere therein to my
" life's

“life’s end ; and never to believe or teach any thing not conformable to it.” See the preface to Jortin’s Remarks on ecclesiastical history, vol. i. p. 17. Indeed, I do not see that any thing short of this will satisfy your tutors that your *creed is absolutely fixed* ; and without this you will be in the same reproachful situation with myself.

This gentleman advises the Dean of Canterbury to have nothing more to say to me, and he even wishes that I may never see what he addresses to you, “because his letter was written without any view to convert me, but to preserve you.” But if this had been his object, he should have circulated his *Address* in the universities only, and not have advertised it for public sale.

As to my *religion*, it is, according to this candid writer, “without a soul, without a bible” (that is worth your attention) without a church, “and without a Saviour.” What this sentence wants in truth and sense, it makes up in sound.

A father, more careful of the orthodoxy than of the honesty of his son Charles, informs him, p. 21, that all good and wise men in every age “have thought it their duty to comply with the established religion of their country, and that he only subscribes the thirty-nine articles as a layman, and as terms of peace, and communion.”

According to these wise maxims, his dear Charles ought to be a pagan with pagans, a Mahometan with Mahometans, and a christian only with christians ; that is, he is to be of no religion at all ; and then, indeed, he may subscribe any thing. This is the wisdom that is ascribed to the vicar of Bray, who, in all the revolutions in this country, about the time of the reformation, like *a wise and good man*, was consistent in keeping his preferment. What this wise father meant by subscribing *as a layman*, or as *a term of peace and communion*, is best known to himself. I am utterly unable to divine it ; and as little would it have been comprehended by those who framed these articles, who certainly meant to enforce *consent in matters of faith*.

The same excellent judge of this controversy who says, p. 25, that he is " no bigot to orthodoxy" (in which I verily believe he says true) and that " when he was a young man he was inclined to think freely on these subjects, and was " a little staggered at the doctrine of the Trinity," speaks of the opinion of Dr. Clarke, and even that of Dr. Price, as " differing from orthodoxy " by a slight distinction," whereas he says that my opinions (which are infinitely nearer to those of Dr. Price than Dr. Price's are to the standard of orthodoxy) " approach very near to those of " Hobbes and Spinoza, in their atheistical tendency." and p. 9, that on my principles I
" may

"may as well give up the belief of a deity, as
 "that of the Trinity." You will not, I hope,
 expect from me a serious confutation of such
 absurd calumny as this,

I am, &c.

L E T T E R VII.

Of a Letter addressed to me by an Under-Graduate.

GENTLEMEN,

THERE is another publication I shall take
 more particular notice of, not that it has
 more of real plausibility in it, but because it has
 been more noticed by the world, and because it
 is written by a young man, an Under-graduate of
 Oxford, perhaps the very Charles to whom the
 preceding letter is addressed. Indeed, he appears
 to be a very docile youth. The oldest fellow of
 a college could not have imbibed his father's
 maxims, or have profited more by the sermons
 delivered at St. Mary's, than he has done. After
 learning himself, he justly thinks himself suffi-
 ciently qualified to teach others.

So perfectly indifferent is this well tutored young man to the pursuit of truth, that he ludicrously represents myself, and all who are engaged in it, p. 5, as *John Gilpin*, and *the man at Hughes's*, and himself and his friends as unconcerned spectators, standing aghast at our performances. Two centuries ago, Luther and Melancthon, Zuinglius and Calvin, were the *performers*, and the Catholics in general the *gaping crowd*.

After I had written my *Letter to Mr. Pitt*, I thought I had gone too far in representing the English universities as “stagnant waters, offensive to the neighbourhood,” and really meant to make a public retraction of it; but I suspended this design, when I perused this *letter*, which was read with applauding avidity by many, and was never censured, as it ought to have been, by the heads of the University; though it abounds with such maxims, and reasonings, as ought to be reprobated as nuisances in every free country, or where there is the least regard to truth and integrity. For your instruction, Gentlemen, I shall animadvert upon a few passages in that performance, and especially on those in which the author defends your subscription to the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, at the time of matriculation; a thing so manifestly absurd, that the very mention of it is sufficient to expose it.

“To make an oral profession, amounts,” he says, p. 25, “to the same thing with setting our
“hands

“hands to a paper which contains it. But who, from the beginning, was ever admitted into the christian church without first having made such a profession?”

But, he is greatly mistaken, if he imagine that any persons were admitted to the profession of christianity, in the primitive ages, without allowing time to be instructed in the principles of it, and without giving some evidence that they saw reason for making the profession. Supposing that any person had come to an apostle, and said, “I hear you teach a religion which is called the christian. I am intirely ignorant of it, or of the reasons by which it is supported; but if you will please to baptize me, I may learn these particulars afterwards.” Do you think that any apostle would have baptized such a person? Did not the christian church in the early ages always keep persons a considerable time in the class of *catechumens*, in which they were regularly instructed in the principles of christianity, before they were admitted to baptism.

Now is any thing like this done at your universities? Do the persons who admit students, and receive their subscriptions, tell them that, before they can be admitted to the privileges of the place, they must signify their assent to a certain number of articles of faith, and that it behoves them to consider whether they can admit them, or not? Do they give you proper *time* for this consideration, and refuse to receive your subscriptions

unless you can give an account of the articles to be subscribed, and of your reasons for assenting to them? Indeed, I fear that the conduct of the heads of your universities is very different from that of any ministers in the christian church for a long period of time.

This young gentleman makes another objection to the abolition of subscription which I should never have thought of, when he says, p. 6, "I cannot renounce paganism and embrace christianity, might a heathen have said; for though I now think the former to be false, and the latter to be true, I will not pretend to say when my creed will be fixed. I may, on farther examination, think exactly the reverse." With this, those who receive a man's present confession of faith have nothing to do. The apostles did not refuse to admit a person to baptism because he might afterwards apostatize, though they knew this to be a possible case, because it often happened. When you subscribe your thirty-nine articles, you do not, I imagine, engage never to think otherwise. This would be curious indeed. However, not having been educated in your universities, I may be ignorant of their constitution; and if this be the case, it is an objection to your subscriptions with which I was not acquainted.

Another sentiment in his letter is even more extraordinary than would be the practice of *subscribing for life*; as it implies a degree of obsequiousness,

ousness, and abjectness of mind, at which I should have thought that the spirit of any man, and especially that of a young man, and an Englishman, must have revolted. "If" says he, p. 27, "the compilers were mistaken in an article, it is incumbent on our governors, when convinced of such mistake, to alter or expunge that article." Nothing then, it seems, is incumbent on *yourselves*. You must receive whatever your governors are pleased to prescribe; and should they think proper to give you the articles of a Popish, a Presbyterian; or a Mahometan creed, you have nothing to do but to sign them. You do not even claim the liberty of expostulating with your governors. Every thing they do must be from their own motion.

The same servile disposition appears in another passage of his letter, p. 25, "You exhort us to associate and pray relief from subscription to the articles of the church of England. Why? that we may be free to change as you have changed. But Sir, we desire not to do so." That is, he does not wish to have the power of changing, not even of getting right, if he were ever so far wrong. Here, he discovers plain marks of the *chain*, which the wolf discovered on the neck of the well fed dog in the fable, and of its having been worn a considerable time. Let me range at large, and have, at least, the power of going where I please, though I may sometimes go where I should not.

For

For the same reason for which this Under-graduate contemptuously rejects his *religious* liberty, he would no doubt reject *civil* liberty also; and I suppose he would be equally proud of both his chains.

What he farther says on the subject of *authority*, (which has no meaning at all, if it do not mean authority in matters in religion, or receiving a creed imposed by others) is in the highest degree disgraceful in any place of liberal education, which ought to be devoted to enquiry after truth, and the use of our reason and best judgment in the enquiry. "You are an enemy," he says, p. 28, "to *authority*. But when all is said, in many instances it must take place. Some things we must at first receive on the authority of our parents, others on that of our tutors, and others on that of our governors, ecclesiastical and civil. In all, or any of these, it is possible we may afterwards discover or think we discover, errors." Indeed, Gentlemen, if errors should not be found, or, which is the same thing with respect to ourselves, be *supposed* to be found, in a creed consisting of thirty-nine complex articles, composed above two hundred years ago, in the very dawn of the reformation from popery, by persons who now exercise their own reason on the subject, it would be very extraordinary indeed. But of these acknowledged errors, and the consequence of requiring a subscription to them, this Under-graduate makes very light.

“We pity,” he adds, p. 28, “with all our hearts, the poor old gentleman of sixty, who lamented with so many tears, to you his confessor, (having perhaps unfortunately first taken you for his tutor) that he had subscribed to the doctrine of the Trinity, and the incarnation of the son of God. Inconveniences may follow in every possible case; but of inconveniences we must chuse the least; and it is better that a few individuals suffer temporal loss, than the church should profess no faith, through fear of professing a false one.” All this, you cannot deny, might have been said, and even with more plausibility than at present, before the reformation. The adversaries of Luther might have said to him, “we must have a creed, and this creed may contain errors. But it is better that it should be so, than that we should have no creed at all; and as to those who cannot subscribe to it, let them leave the church, and the emoluments of it to those who can.” But who then, Gentlemen, would be left in it. Not the inquisitive, or the the conscientious, but as many of the unthinking, the dishonest, and unbelievers, as could get into it. And when once you have admitted such characters as these, you have no means of getting them out. They will promise and subscribe any thing.

The maxim that “authority once established must be submitted to,” which is shamelessly avowed

avowed by Dr. Balguy, is wonderfully convenient for this writer's purpose. It may be compared to a coat that equally suits heat or cold, wet or dry, and will carry you through the world. For, go where you will, among Papists, Mahometans, or Pagans, you will find *authority*; and to this, of whatever kind it be, and in what manner soever it has been established, this tame Under-graduate will make no difficulty of submitting.

I cannot sufficiently express my indignation at such profligate maxims; and I must say that the seminaries in which they are taught are nothing less than nuisances in a free country. But I trust there is a prospect of better things even in Oxford. This Under-graduate, however, I perceive, has no idea of any other christian churches than such as are framed on such maxims as these. "As to a church without any confession," he says, p. 27, "which should receive into its bosom all the different sects, and discordant opinions, now roaming about the world, we have no conception of such a church; nor, if such a one could be framed, or when framed subsist for a twelve-month, do we desire to be members of it?"

In this case then, he would not have been a member of the church that was established by the apostles. For they required nothing besides faith in the divine mission of Christ, as the term of communion with them; and this is the only article of faith that is properly essential to christianity. This

is the maxim of Unitarian churches, which have subsisted many twelvemonths, and which, I doubt not, will subsist when the church of England, as by law established, shall be forgotten.

So much more liberal are even the modern Catholics than this Under-graduate of Oxford, that I lately heard a most respectable priest of that communion say, that he would have nothing in any public liturgy, or confession of faith, but what all christians, in all ages, and at all times, could agree in. *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, was his language; which I am informed was also that of the excellent Hales of Eton, a member of the church of England. Where, Sir, must this Under-graduate have lived to have got so contracted, and so dark a mind; when the sunshine of liberality has reached even the church of Rome? Must it be said that the very last footsteps of bigotry shall be in Oxford.

Before he can be authorized to pronounce, as he now takes upon himself to do, what *may*, and what *may not* exist, and exist with advantage, in the world at large, he must look beyond the precincts of your University. A man who has never seen or heard of any animals besides those of England, would say that the elephant and rhinoceros were mere chimeras.

Go upon the continent, and you will see what you cannot in England, many Catholic and many Protestant

Protestant states, admitting to offices of the highest trust and power, persons of all religions indiscriminately. And go to North America, you will see a large country, of greater extent than the whole of Europe, in many parts of which there is a strong general sense of religion, without the civil establishment of any particular mode of it; and yet the people live at peace, and in good harmony with one another. These things are deemed impossible at Oxford, but they are realized in the world.

As to the many particular opinions of which this writer lightly, very lightly indeed, descants, I shall not enter into them in this letter to you (it being evident that he has not yet read my *Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit*, which he takes upon him to censure, and acknowledges, p. 29, he had not read *Mr. Lindsey's Sequel* any farther than p. 87) but I hold myself ready to discuss them with more able opponents. That the genuine sense of scripture, and the general tenor of it, are clearly in favour of what I have advanced, I have no doubt; and as to the principal of them, on which every thing else of consequence depends, I am now, in my *History of early Opinions concerning Christ*, earnestly calling upon his superiors, such as Dr. Horne, Mr. White, and Mr. Howes, to prove the existence of that doctrine which he holds so sacred, in the three first centuries of christianity; a period in which there is no want of records, to prove what were the opinions of both the learned, and the unlearned. The evidence which I have produced, that the christian church

church was originally Unitarian, has now been some time before the world, and it challenges the most rigorous examination of his masters.

This Under-graduate ironically thanks me, p. 45, for "my compliment to your Universities, as resembling pools of stagnant waters, secured by dams and mounds, and offensive to the neighbourhood." If you would wipe away the reproach, make a proper outlet for your stagnant water; let learning flow at Oxford as freely as the Isis in its neighbourhood; and admit not only any native of Great-Britain, but any inhabitant of the world, to enjoy the advantages of it, unfettered by your illiberal subscriptions. When I am asked, as I often am, by foreigners, at which of our Universities I was educated, and am obliged to say in reply, that at neither of them would myself, or any son of mine, be admitted to study, I blush for you, and for my country. You ought to blush for yourselves. When I was lately at Oxford, and was struck beyond my expectation with the noble advantages for study of which you are possessed, I could not help saying with Horace, *Cur eget indigus quisque, te divite?* A professor in the University of Cracow, who lately visited me, and who had come through Oxford in his way to Birmingham, told me he was absolutely astonished to find that such a seminary as that is was not open to all the world, and that he should hardly have believed the fact, if he had not been informed of it
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at the place. In his own University he said the professors indeed must be Catholics, but the students might be of any religion. He said they had several Protestants, and some Jews. In another part of Poland he informed me that there is an University, countenanced by the government, in which all the professors are Protestants. With respect to *liberality* we shall soon, to appearance, be once more the *divisi toto orbe Britannii*. Let those blush whom it may concern.

I am sorry to see so able a writer as Mr. Paley (whose work is, in several respects, very justly admired in the Universities) defend the subscription to the articles of the church of England on so very poor a ground, as a supposition that it was the intention of the compilers of them to exclude from the church only the Papists, the Anabaptists, and the Puritans; and therefore that any person who belongs to none of these classes may safely subscribe them. "They," says he, p. 181, "who contend "that nothing less can justify subscription to the "thirty-nine articles, than the actual belief of each "and every separate proposition contained in them, "must suppose that the legislature expected the "consent of ten thousand men, and that in perpetual succession, not to one controverted proposition, but to many hundreds. It is difficult to "conceive how this could be expected by any, who "observed the incurable diversity of human opinion "upon all subjects short of demonstration."

But

But how are we to judge of men's intentions, but by their language. Absurd, no doubt, it was to expect what Mr. Paley states; but the compilers of the articles certainly *did* expect it, or they would have had recourse to different and shorter expedients. Had they meant nothing more than to exclude Papists, Anabaptists, and Puritans, they would have confined their subscription to such articles as were inconsistent with their peculiar tenets. Can Mr. Paley believe that, if any of them had been asked, whether he did not mean to exclude all *Arians*, and *Socinians* from the church of England, he would not have replied in the affirmative? And therefore according to Mr. Paley's own ideas, none of *them* ought to subscribe.

It is now, I find, very much the custom to say, that you may safely subscribe the thirty-nine articles of the church of England, provided you think that it is, upon the whole, the best constituted of all the established churches, or that you think it preferable to any of the sects of the dissenters, though there are many things that you disapprove of in it, and many of the particular articles that you do not think to be true.

But can you think that this was the idea of those who framed the articles, or has there been any act of the legislature since their times that authorizes such a subscription? And certainly there is no other power that has a right to define the meaning of subscription.

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If,

If, however, this be your own real meaning in subscribing, honestly declare it at the time of subscription, and see how it will be received. At present, when you subscribe to all the articles together (which is the same thing as subscribing to each of them separately) you assert some truths, and some falsehoods. But is there any other case in which the telling of some truths will excuse the telling of any falsehoods? What would you think of any man who, when upon his oath, should do so in a court of justice? And is not a deliberate subscription a thing as solemn as that, and a case that requires as scrupulous an adherence to exact truth?

Besides, if a general preference of the constitution of the church of England would justify your subscription to *all* her articles, you ought at least to have examined whether it is intitled to that preference, by a careful comparison of it with other churches; and you ought to be particularly upon your guard, lest the external advantages of an established and endowed church do not lay some bias on your judgment. But can you say that you have done any thing of this at the time of your subscription, whether at matriculation, or afterwards?

Far would I be, gentlemen, from leading you to despise your tutors, or your parents, or to resist any *proper authority*, as several of my opponents more than insinuate. I know the feelings of both parent and tutor, and am sensible how necessary it
is

is that young persons should submit, and in some cases even implicitly, to their superiors. But there is a power to which myself, my children, and my pupils, are equally subject, and to this we all owe the greatest deference. We are all the children of God, and he is stiled *the God of truth*; and you need not be told that you must *obey God rather than man*.

As you value the favour of God, therefore, you must respect *truth*, and *sincerity*; and on no consideration, at the injunction of no authority whatever, should you declare, in any form, that you believe any doctrine to be true, when you know that you have not duly considered it, and therefore cannot tell whether it be so or not. The doctrine being in itself true will not excuse you. Your declaration implies that you *believe* it to be true, and consequently that you have seen sufficient *reason* to believe it, that is, that you have duly examined it. Otherwise you might just as well subscribe the thirty-nine articles at your baptism, or have your godfathers or godmothers subscribe them for you.

Let me recommend to your perusal an excellent work of the late Archdeacon Blackburne, intitled *the Confessional*, in which you will see every pretence for subscribing what is not really believed exposed as it ought to be. But surely this is a case that cannot require any arguing. Had not the temptation to subscribe, and the inconvenience of not subscribing, been so great, we should never have

heard of subscription to the thirty-nine articles, as *articles of peace, or communion*, or any other of those wretched subterfuges that we now hear of, but which would have been reprobated with the greatest indignation by the framers of the articles, as they are by those who subscribe *bona fide* at this day.

What Dr. Croft says of the clergy applies with equal force to all who join in worship with them. "What ought to be imagined," he says, p. 129, "concerning those who enter the holy temple, and offer supplications to God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and yet disbelieve them to be objects of adoration? Is not the sin of hypocrisy and duplicity aggravated when committed in the more immediate presence of him unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid?" Unless, therefore, you really believe Christ to be a proper object of worship, you ought neither to subscribe a declaration that he is so, nor, on any account, join in such worship.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R VIII.

Of Dr. Croft's Bampton Lectures.

GENTLEMEN,

THOUGH *Dr. Croft's Sermons* do not immediately concern myself, yet as they relate to the subject of my address to you, I cannot wholly pass them without notice. He avows himself a friend to freedom of enquiry, but advances many things utterly inconsistent with it; and the general tendency of all his discourses is evidently to discourage it. But his own faith is so great, that it is the less to be wondered at, that he should expect to find a considerable degree of it in others.

"If transubstantiation," he says, p. 125, "prayers for the dead, purgatory, or any other part of their institution" (viz. that of the catholics) "which Protestants reject, had been found in the sacred writers, our opposition would be unwarrantable. We should be found to fight against God." This brings to my mind the story of a good old woman, who, on being asked whether she believed the literal truth of Jonah being swallowed by a whale, replied, yes, and added, that if the scriptures had said that

Jonah swallowed the whale, she should have believed it too. How a man can be said to *believe* what is, in the nature of things, *impossible*, on any authority, I cannot conceive. Perhaps Dr. Croft can explain the mental process by which it is performed.

This writer has formed the highest idea of the importance of a civil establishment of religion, and he ascribes every mischief to sectaries; while others, who are sufficiently attached to an establishment, have the generosity to acknowledge that sectaries are of some use, at least, like an opposition to government. "If our Jerusalem," he says, p. 169, were at unity with herself, if her "inhabitants all spake the same thing, if there were "no divisions among them, &c. the general interest of christianity would daily be improved."

Now it requires but little discernment, and a little knowledge of history, and of the world, to see that the reverse of this must be true. The Catholics might with the same reason say of *their* church what Dr. Croft does of the church of England, and might exclaim against the reformers in general, as much as he does against the dissenters of this country. But is not the state of the catholic church much improved since the reformation? And is it not equally evident that the clergy of the church of England are much more learned, and more exemplary in their conduct, in consequence of there being dissenters, and those

those not despicable? Is not an useful emulation excited by this means? What learned works are produced by the divines of Sweden and Denmark, where there are no dissenters?

Sectaries, no doubt, give the divines of the establishment some trouble, as we see in the present controversy; but the Dean of Canterbury allows that the discipline is not without its use. Does not the opposition they meet with make them give greater attention to their principles; and if they be well founded, will they not stand the firmer in consequence of it? It is nothing but *error* that can finally suffer by discussion. Truth ever seeks the light, and challenges investigation.

Dr. Croft himself when, in his last sermon, he has worked himself up to some degree of courage, appears to entertain no doubt with respect to the issue of any contest, and I dare say, smiles at my grains of gun-powder. "The attempts to overturn our establishment," he says, p. 195, "have met with no success equal to the sanguine expectations of our adversaries. The numbers of the discontented bear no proportion to the whole ecclesiastic body, many of whom search the scriptures, peruse the Fathers, and consult every source of information with unremitting zeal and industry. The spirit of inquiry ought not to be restrained by human laws, and to

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"that

"that spirit alone we wish to be indebted for the
 "permanence of our church."

This is the language of courage, and of generosity; but this paragraph is by no means in unison with many other parts of the sermons. In some of them he almost adopts the language of despair. "We are surrounded," he says, p. 2, "by so numerous an host of adversaries, that we
 "must be cautious how we put on our spiritual
 "armour, and lest we expose to danger the walls
 "of our defended city. All our vigilance will
 "be scarce sufficient for the conflict." The prayer that follows is that of men who find themselves reduced to the last extremity. "May he
 "who teacheth man knowledge, and giveth
 "strength for the battle, support and assist us,
 "May he give a blessing to the weakest and most
 "imperfect endeavours, and may zeal and sincerity compensate for the weakness of our performances," that is, may God give to our weak arguments all the effect of strong ones, which I suppose he expects from the insatiation of their opposers. This diffidence, you observe, is expressed in the very opening of his first discourse. And in the course of his work he drops several hints of the propriety of a little *human*, as well as *divine aid*. In p. 131, he mentions "a just
 "extent of power," the use of which prudence alone restrains, and that we "should have no reason to complain if we were restrained by the
 "civil

* civil magistrate from expressing our sentiments
 "on certain subjects."

Though one of his texts is Luke xii. 57. *Yea and why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right*, he says, p. 92, the "principle which has given a sanction to all the wildness and extravagance of enthusiasts and sectaries is this, whatever right any body of men claim to separate from a church once established, the same right every individual may claim to form a system of doctrines and opinions for himself," and also p. 76, "it was an absurdity reserved for modern days, to imagine that every man was qualified, and authorized, to frame a system of belief for himself." Now does not his text sufficiently authorize any man to do this, and did not Luther act upon that authority? Did not Calvin form a system of belief for himself, before any state adopted it?

Dr. Croft speaks with particular caution on the doctrine of the Trinity, and considers all attempts to explain it as one of *the abuses of reason*. "That every person," he says, p. 126, "in the ever blessed Trinity is God, and Lord, no one denies, who believes in the Trinity; but to speak of them collectively, as *three Gods*, and *three Lords* has an air of polytheism." But surely it would be no *abuse* of reason, but a capital *use* of it, to shew that this is nothing more than an
 air

air of polytheism, and not the *reality*. For, after saying that the Father is God, the Son equally God, and the Holy Ghost God also, it is very natural to count them up, and say that then there must be *three* Gods, since $1+1+1=3$. It must certainly be a very laudible use of reason to extricate men from this great difficulty respecting revelation.

It is always deemed a great advantage to be able to devise familiar illustrations of abstract propositions. Few of them can be proved to satisfaction that are incapable of it. And had this doctrine been likely to receive any advantage from attempts to explain it, it can hardly be doubted but that Dr. Croft would have recommended, rather than have discouraged them.

This writer enumerates several other abuses of reason; but if you consider them all, you will find that they agree in this one circumstance, viz. that the discussion of the articles he specifies would probably be attended with some inconvenience to the established system.

He says, p. 78, "Nor can we forbear wondering that, after the *Defensio fidei Nicene*, published by an eminent prelate, and after a late abstract of the opinions of the Fathers of the three first centuries, the author of which received from this place a just tribute of gratitude,

“tude, the unlearned should be told that the divinity of the Son and Holy Ghost was a doctrine of a later date.”

In my turn, I may be allowed to express my surprise, that any person, who has given the least attention to the present controversy, should hold this language. I allow all that Bishop Bull and Mr. Burgh ascribe to the Fathers of the second and third century; I allow that they held the doctrine of the divinity of the Son, at least; but it was in a qualified sense, and by no means the same that was maintained after the council of Nice. I have also distinctly shewn whence the notion of these Fathers was borrowed; but what I maintain, and by evidence drawn from their own writings, is that while the learned christians were Trinitarians, the common people, who had no knowledge of Platonism, were simply Unitarians; and that therefore the probability is that such was the faith of the apostles. Let Dr. Croft, or any future Bampton lecturer, examine and refute my arguments if he can. In my opinion they cannot chuse a more important, or more a seasonable topic. What signifies thundering from a distant bastion, when the enemy is breaking open a gate, where the artillery cannot reach him. Let the most strenuous efforts be made where the danger is most pressing.

I observe that one of the subjects particularly specified by Mr. Bampton is, “the authority of the writings of the primitive Fathers, as to the
3 “faith

“faith and practice of the primitive church.” Let the heads of colleges, then (who, I find, have the nomination of the preacher) appoint a person the most eminent for his acquaintance with ecclesiastical history; and let him be directed to prove, in opposition to what I have advanced, in my *History of Early Opinions concerning Christ*, that the great body of unlearned christians in the primitive times were Trinitarians. You have every advantage for these researches at Oxford, whereas we, who are not permitted to study at either of your universities, can only be said to gather the crumbs that fall from your table.

Rejoicing that you enjoy noble advantages for which I have often sighed, and hoping that they will not be lost upon you,

I am, Gentlemen,

Your sincere well-wisher,

J. PRIESTLEY.

P. S. I shall take this opportunity of acknowledging a mistake I made in my former Letters, and also in the first edition of my *Letter to Mr. Pitt*; having been since informed that, at Cambridge, the thirty-nine articles are not subscribed at matriculation, but only on admission to the degree of master of arts; though the students there are obliged to attend the service of the church of England from the first, and to declare that they are

bona

bona fide, members of it when they commence bachelors. I hope that the attempt which the members of that university are now making to relieve themselves still more, will be attended with success.

I must likewise inform the purchasers of some of the copies of the second edition of my *Letter to Mr. Pitt*, that I had been led into a mistake with respect to the votes of the bishops concerning the writ *de Heretico comburendo*. A person on whose information I had perfect confidence gave me the account, and wrote the note p. 13, for me. The leaf containing it was cancelled as soon as I discovered the error, and any persons, by sending to the publishers, may have their copies rectified.

N. B. The Letter relating to the *Under-graduate of Oxford* was written before the report of its author being the Dean of Canterbury reached me; and as the writer begins with saying, "I am one of the young men to whom you have offered your services, as a director of their theological studies;" it is barely credible that a man of his character, should affirm what cannot be termed less than an *absolute falsehood*. If the report be without foundation, the Dean will, no doubt, take an early opportunity of disclaiming a publication so unworthy of him.

An ADDITION to the LETTERS relating to Mr. HOWES.

ON expressing my surprize that Mr. Howes should ascribe the *Extracts from Theodotus* in Clemens Alexandrinus to Theodotus the Tanner by (which means he makes one of the ancient Unitarians a believer in the pre-existence, and as he also thought, in the divinity of Christ) he said, in his former publication, p. 13, "in regard to *Theodotus*, this will be discussed afterwards." and as I had observed that the learned editors of Clemens Alexandrinus, viz. Sylburgius and Potter, were not of his opinion, he adds, "At present I shall "only observe, that if modern authority were "capable to decide the question, I can produce "as good authority on my side, that of Cave and "M. Simon; but I form my judgment from internal evidence in those extracts themselves."

As Mr. Howes, in his last publication, has said nothing on this subject, though, according to the arrangement of his materials, I think he ought to have done it, I shall content myself with giving an extract from Dr. Lardner's account of the different persons of the name of Theodotus, in his *History of Heretics*, p. 370.

First.

"First, A Valentinian. Cave, in his account of
 "Theodotus the Tanner, ascribes to him all the
 "opinions which he has collected out of the orien-
 "tal doctrine, subjoined to the works of Clement
 "of Alexandria. But that is confounding things
 "as different and opposite as can well be. Theo-
 "dotus the Tanner is reckoned among those who
 "did not allow Jesus to have existed before his
 "nativity of Mary, which is very different from
 "the sentiments represented by Cave from the
 "above-mentioned work. And yet Fabricius
 "seems to have been of the same opinion with
 "Cave. Tillemont perceived that the Theodotus
 "mentioned in these extracts, was a Valentinian.
 "Beaufobre had no doubt of it, and says he
 "flourished about the year of our Lord, 130."

I quote Dr. Lardner, because Mr. Howes seems
 to have some respect for his judgment and impar-
 tiality. In his last publication he says, p. 44,
 "It may be observed as truly wonderful, that
 "Dr. Lardner, if inclined to Unitarianism, should
 "have left no accounts behind him of the Ebio-
 "nites, Nazarenes, or Elcesaites. One should
 "have thought that those pretended founders of
 "his own system would have been the first to
 "claim his attention. I cannot then but suspect
 "that they have been suppressed, because they
 "proved too plainly the belief of the Ebionites
 "in the divinity of Christ. For Lardner was of
 "too inquisitive, and too rational a turn of mind,
 "to have thus neglected altogether the important
 heresies

“heresies of the first centuries, while he treated
 “minutely of several inconsiderable ones; and
 “he was apparently too honest to have misled
 “his readers with respect to the real tenets of the
 “Ebionites and Nazarenes. *Hinc ille biatus*. This
 “is the more strange, because he does give some
 “account of those sects in his other works, but
 “nothing any way favourable to their being the
 “founders of humanisin.”

What Dr. Lardner would have done if he had
 lived to have published his own work, no man
 can tell. That he considered the doctrine of the
Nazarenes as no proper *heresy*, and yet totally dif-
 ferent from that of the *Trinitarians* or *Arians*, is
 evident from his four *posthumous discourses*, in which,
 after treating of these two schemes, he considers,
 and recommends, p. 40, “the doctrine of the
 “Unitarians or Nazarenes;” his account of which
 corresponds exactly to what is commonly called
Socinianism, of which it is well known that he was a
 zealous advocate, as Dr. Price, in his *Appendix*,
 p. 393, observes. Let Mr. Howes read his *Letters*
on the Logos, which led me to adopt his opinion.
 But I should not much wonder if Mr. Howes
 should hereafter express some doubt of my being
 an Unitarian. Indeed, of the two, it appears to
 me quite as easy to prove that there are no Uni-
 tarians at present, as that there were none in the
 primitive ages of christianity.

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